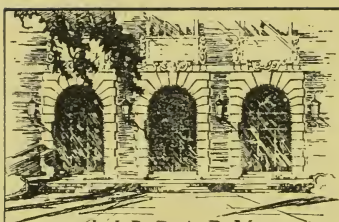


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FROM ONE GENERATION
TO ANOTHER

VOL. II.

FROM ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER

BY

HENRY SETON MERRIMAN

AUTHOR OF 'THE SLAVE OF THE LAMP' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. II.

*'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's
teeth are set on edge'*

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1892

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OF

THE SECOND VOLUME



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FROM ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER



CHAPTER XVI

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done !

HE is a wise liar who makes use of the truth at times. Seymour Michael was clever enough to stay his fantastic tongue in his further explanation to Arthur Agar.

‘It is a long story,’ he said, ‘and in order fully to state the case to you I must go into some matters of which perhaps you have heard little. Do you happen to be anything

of a politician? Are you, I mean, interested in foreign affairs?’

Arthur confessed that he knew nothing of foreign affairs, a fact of which Michael had become fully aware on entering the narrow-minded, characteristic room.

‘You perhaps know,’ Seymour Michael went on, in a tone of which the sarcasm was lost upon its victim, ‘that Russia is living in hopes of some day possessing India?’

‘Oh—ah—yes!’

Arthur Agar was obviously not at all interested. There were so many things of a similar nature to be remembered—things which did not really interest him—and those nearer home had precedence in his mind. He knew, for instance, that Trinity Hall lived in hopes of heading the river that year, and that the Narcissus Club were going to give a narcissus-

coloured dance in May week, at which entertainment even the jellies were to be yellow.

The General now launched into an explanation, couched carefully in language suitable to his hearer's limited knowledge of the facts.

‘Russia,’ he said, ‘is now so large that, unless they make it larger still and get tropical resources to draw upon, it will fall to pieces. They want India. Some day there will be a fight, a very large fight. But not yet. In the meantime it is a question of learning every inch of that country where the battle-fields will be, and every thought in the minds of those men who will look on at the fight. I——’

He paused, recollecting that the fame of his own name might have penetrated even to this out-of-the-way spot. ‘Some of us

have been at this all our lives. Over there, on the Frontier, there are certain numbers of us, on both sides, playing a very deep game. Your brother is one of the players, a prominent man on the field ; a half-back, one might call him.'

There was a strong temptation to continue the allegory—to say that he himself was goal-keeper ; but Seymour Michael was one of the few men who can in need make even their own vanity subservient to convenience.

'We watch each other,' he went on, 'like cats. We always know where the others are, and what they are doing. Your brother was one of the most closely watched by the other side. For some time we have been aware of an influence at work with a tribe of Hillmen who have hitherto been friendly to us, and we have not been able to find what

this influence is, or how it is brought to bear upon them. We were so closely watched that we could not penetrate to the affected country. But at last the chance came. Your brother was gazetted as killed. We allowed the report to remain uncontradicted. We let the other side think that Jem Agar was dead, and therefore incapable of doing any more harm, and now he has gone up into that country to find out what they are after.'

Arthur nodded.

'I see,' he said. He was rather vague about it all, and had not quite realised yet that this was all true, that this man whom he still hated and distrusted without any apparent reason was real and living, speaking to him in real waking life and not in a dream. Moreover, he had not nearly realised that Jem was alive. The evidence

of his own black clothes, of the sombre-edged stationery, of his mourning habit of life this term, was too strong upon a mind like his to be suddenly thrown aside. Perhaps he had discovered that the consolation of inheritance was greater than was at first apparent. In six weeks he had slipped very comfortably into Jem's shoes, and it seemed only right and proper that his life should have a background of the noble proportions of Stagholme. Also, now Stagholme meant Dora; for he was worldly-wise enough to know that his own personal value in the world's estimation had undergone a great change in six short weeks. He knew that the man with the money usually wins.

It would almost seem that Seymour Michael divined his thoughts, at least in part.

‘There are two reasons,’ he went on to

say, 'why absolute secrecy is necessary : first, for Agar's own sake. He is, of course, in disguise. No one suspects that he is there, and that is his only safeguard in the country where he is. Secondly—but I want your whole attention, please.'

'Yes, I am listening.'

Seymour Michael leant forward and emphasized his remark by tapping on the table with his gloved finger.

'The mission is so extremely dangerous that it comes almost to the same thing.'

'What do you mean?' inquired Arthur Agar, whose gentle intellect only compassed subtleties of the drawing-room type.

'I mean that Jem Agar is almost as good as a dead man, although he was not killed at Pregalla.'

The man who had wept in this same

room six weeks before looked up with a gleam of something very like hope in his troubled eyes. Such is the power of love. For Arthur Agar had not been ignorant of the probability that in his step-brother, once dead but now living, he had had a rival. 'Sister' Cecilia had seen to that.

'But when shall we know? When will he come back?' inquired he. And Seymour Michael, the subtle, began to see his way more clearly.

'Certainly not for six months, probably not for nine.'

One may take it that no man is sent into the world a ready-made scoundrel. It all depends upon the circumstances of life. No one is safe right up to the end, and events may combine to make the very best of us into that thing which the world calls a villain.

Arthur Agar, all inexperienced, weak, hereditarily handicapped, suddenly found himself on the balance. And the scales were held, not by the hand of Justice, blind and clement, but by Seymour Michael, very open-eyed, with a keen watchfulness for his own purpose ; biassed ; unscrupulous. It must be admitted that circumstances were against Arthur Agar.

There is nothing to be done,' added Seymour Michael, with a smile which his companion could not be expected to fathom, 'but to keep very quiet, and to make the best of your opportunities while you occupy the position of heir.'

Arthur smiled in a sickly way. He felt suddenly as if this man could see right through him, and all the while he hated him. Seymour Michael meant 'debts'—it was only

natural that one of his race should think of money before all things—Arthur's thoughts were fixed on Dora. And guiltily he imagined himself to be detected.

‘You will be doing no harm to Jem,’ said the tempter with his pleasant laugh. ‘You are called upon to act the part well for his sake.’

‘Ye-es, I suppose I am,’ answered Arthur. ‘And I must tell no one?’

‘Absolutely no one.’

Despite his credulous nature, Arthur Agar was singularly suspicious on this occasion.

‘Are these Jem's own instructions?’ he asked.

‘His own instructions,’ replied Seymour Michael callously.

Arthur paused in deep reflection. It was

evident, he argued to himself, that Jem could not have cared for Dora, or he would never have left her in ignorance of the truth. If, therefore, during Jem's absence, he could win Dora for himself, he could not in any way be accused of wronging his step-brother. And we all know that a conscience that argues with itself is lost.

‘To make things easier for us both,’ pursued Seymour Michael, ‘I propose that this interview remain a strict secret between ourselves, and for that purpose I have suppressed my own name. It is a fairly well-known name. I may mention that in guarantee of good faith. As, however, you do not know me, it will be easier for you to suppress the fact that we have ever met.’

Arthur almost laughed at these last words. It seemed as if he had known this man all

his life—as if his whole existence had merely been a period of waiting until he should come.

‘And my mother must not know?’ he said. He kept harking back to this question with a singular persistence. There are a few men and many women for whom a secret is a responsibility to be transferred to the first-comer without hesitation. One half of the world takes pleasure in divulging a secret—for the other half it is positive pain to keep one.

Seymour Michael never dreamt that the secret might be in unsafe hands. To a secretive man like himself the incapacity to keep a counsel never suggested itself. There is no doubt that where we all err is in persistently judging others by ourselves. Arthur Agar was keenly aware of his own incompetence in many things—he was one of those

promising undergraduates who hire a man to water six small plants in a window-box. Incompetence was by him reduced to a science. There were so many things which he could not do, that he was forced to find occupations for a very extensive leisure, and these were usually of the petty accomplishment order, which are graceful in young girls and very disgraceful in young men.

Now the doctrine of incompetence is a very dangerous one. Already in the criminal courts we are beginning to hear of men and women who do not feel competent to keep the law. There were many laws of social procedure and a few of schoolboy honour which Arthur Agar felt to be beyond him, and he considered that in making confession he was acquiring a right to absolution.

He did not tell General Michael that he

was not good at keeping secrets, chiefly because that gentleman was not of the trivial confession type ; but he made a mental reservation.

Seymour Michael had risen and was walking backwards and forwards slowly between the window and the door. He seemed quite at home in the small room, and his manner of taking three strides and then wheeling round suggested the habit of living in tents.

‘What you must say is that you have received your brother’s effects,’ he said. ‘If they ask from whence—from the War Office. I am the War Office to all intents and purposes. The affair is almost forgotten. All the details have been published—the usual newspaper details, with Fleet Street local colouring. You should have no difficulty.’

‘No,’ answered Arthur meekly, but with another mental reservation.

‘There are, of course, certain legal formalities in progress,’ went on the General, ‘relative to the estate. Those must be allowed to go on. We may trust the lawyers to go slowly. And afterwards they can amuse themselves by undoing what they have done. That is their trade. Half of them make a living by undoing what the others have done. You are . . .’

Seymour Michael so far forgot himself as to pause and make a mental calculation. Arthur saw him do it and never thought of being surprised. It seemed quite natural that this man should possess data upon which to base mental calculations.

‘. . . not twenty-one yet?’ Michael finished the sentence.

‘No.’

‘So that, you see, they cannot make over the estate to you before the time your brother comes or—should—come—back.’

Arthur understood the emphasis perfectly this time. He was getting on.

‘There are,’ continued Michael, who was eminently methodical, ‘a few military formalities, which have had my attention. In fact, I think that everything has been attended to. In case you should require any information, or perhaps advice, write to C 74, Smith’s Library, Vigo Street. That is the address on that envelope.’

Arthur rose too. The thought that his visitor might be about to depart thrilled through him with the warmth of relieved suspense.

‘For your own information,’ said Michael,

looking straight into the wavering, colourless eyes, 'I may tell you that in my opinion—the opinion of an expert—this expedition is exceedingly hazardous. We—we must be prepared for the worst.'

Arthur Agar turned away. He had felt the deep eyes probing his very soul—looking right through him. A sickening sense of weakness was at his heart. He felt that in the presence of this man he did not belong to himself.

'You mean,' he muttered awkwardly, 'that Jem will never come back?'

'I think it most probable. And then—when we have to abandon all hope, I mean—we shall be glad that we kept this thing to ourselves.'

Seymour Michael held out his hand, and pressed the boy's weak fingers in a careless

grip. Then he turned, and with a short 'Good-bye' left him.

Arthur stood looking at the closed door with the frightened eyes of a woman. He looked round at the familiar objects of his room—the futile little gimcracks with which he had surrounded an existence worthy of such environments—the invitation cards on the draped mantelpiece, the little glass vases of fantastic shape with a single bloom of stephanotis, the hundred and one fantasies of a finicking generation wherein Art sap-peth Manhood. And his eyes were suddenly opened to a new world of things which he could not do. He gazed—not without a vague shame—into a perspective of incompetencies.

In the *laissez-aller* of the unreflective he had assumed that life would be a con-

tinuance of small pleasure and refined enjoyments, little dinners and pleasant converse, Dora and a comfortable home, mutual mild delight in flowers and table decoration. Into this assumption Seymour Michael had suddenly stepped—strong, restless, and mysterious—and Arthur became uneasily conscious of possibilities. There might be something in his own life, there might even be something within himself, over which he could have no control. There *was* something within himself—something connected with the man who had gone, leaving unrest behind him, as he left it wherever he passed. What was this? whither would it lead?

Arthur Agar rang the bell, and kept the 'gyp' in the room on some trivial pretext. He was afraid of solitude.

CHAPTER XVII

TWO MOTIVES

Making vain pretence
Of gladness, with an awful sense
Of one mute shadow watching all

‘POOH! the girl is happy enough!’

Mr. Glynde jerked his newspaper up and read an advertisement of steamships about to depart to the West Coast of Africa. His wife—engaged in cutting out a scarlet flannel garment of diminutive proportions (an operation which she made a point of performing on the study table)—gave two gentle snips and ceased her occupation.

She looked at the back of her husband's

head, where the hair was getting a little thin, and said nothing. No one argued with the Reverend Thomas Glynde.

‘The girl is happy enough,’ he repeated, seeking contradiction. There are times when an autocrat would very much like to be argued with.

‘She is always lively and gay,’ he continued defiantly.

‘Too gay,’ Mrs. Glynde whispered to the scissors, with a flash of the only wisdom which Heaven gives away, and it is not given to all mothers.

The winter had closed over Stagholme, the isolating distance-making winter of English country life, wherein each house is thrown upon its own resource, and the peaceful are at rest because their neighbours cannot get at them.

Dora was out. She was out a good deal now ; exceedingly busy in good works of a different type from those effected by ' Sister ' Cecilia. The winter air seemed to invigorate her, and she tramped miles with a can of soup or an infant's flannel wrapper. And always when she came in she was gay, as her father described it. She gave amusing descriptions of her visits among the cottagers, retailed little quaint conceits such as drop from rustic lips declared unto them by their fathers from the old time before them, and in it all she displayed a keen insight into human nature. At times she was brilliant ; which her father noticed with grave approval, ignorant or heedless of the fact that brilliancy means friction. Happy people are not brilliant.

She suddenly developed a taste for

politics, and read the newspaper with a keen interest. Several half-forgotten duties were revived, and their performance became a matter of principle.

Mr. Glynde did not notice these subtle changes. Old men are generally selfish, more so, if possible, than young ones, and Mr. Glynde was eminently so. He only saw other people in relationship to himself. He looked at them through himself.

Mrs. Glynde had taken the opportunity of a 'cutting out' to mention that she thought that a change would do Dora good. During the three months that had elapsed since the announcement of Jem's death, Stagholme had necessarily been a somewhat dull abode. The winter had not come on well, but in fits and starts, with trying winds and much rain. She said these things while she cut

into her roll of red flannel—the scissors seemed to give her courage.

The Rector of Stagholme had awful visions of a furnished house at Brighton or a crammed hotel on the Riviera.

‘Where do you want to go to?’ he inquired, with a gruffness which meant less than it conveyed.

‘To town, dear.’

Now Mr. Glynde loved London.

In the meantime Dora was standing at the gate of the gamekeeper’s little cottage-garden which adjoined the orchard at Stagholme. There were certain women with whom ‘Sister’ Cecilia did not ‘get on,’ and these were by tacit understanding relegated to Dora. This same inability to ‘get on’ was one of the crosses which ‘Sister’ Cecilia carried in a magnified condition

through life. The gamekeeper's wife was one of the failures—a hardy mother of several hardy little embryo gamekeepers, who held that she knew her own business of motherhood best, and intimated as much to 'Sister' Cecilia.

Dora went there very frequently, and the pathos of her way with little children is one of the things which cannot be touched upon here. It is possible that she went there because the cottage was near the Holme, and the way took her past the great house. She had never laid aside her old girlish habit of passing through the rooms, unannounced, to exchange a few words with Mrs. Agar. It was not that she held that lady in great veneration or respect; but in the country people learn to take their neighbours as they are, remembering that they are neighbours.

She went through the orchard and in at the side-door, which stood always open to the turn of the handle. She had fallen into a singular habit of always using this entrance, and of glancing as she passed at the stick-rack, where a rough mountain-ash was wont to stand—a stick which Jem had cut, while she stood by, years before. There was, perhaps, something characteristically suggestive of Jem in this stick—something strong and simple. She was not the person to indulge in sentimental thoughts, she could not afford to do that. Indeed, she often looked into the stick-rack without thinking ; but she never passed it without looking.

In the library she found Mrs. Agar, talking to her maid, who withdrew with a pinched salutation. Mrs. Agar was one of those unfortunate women who level all ranks in their

sore need of a listener. The expression of her face was decidedly lachrymose.

‘Poor Arthur!’ she exclaimed. ‘Dora, dear, something so dreadful has happened!’

‘Yes,’ returned Dora, with the indifference of one who has tasted of the worst.

‘Poor Arthur has received Jem’s papers and diaries and things, and I can see from his letter that it has quite upset him. He is so sympathetic, you know.’

Dora had turned quite away. She usually carried a stick in her country rambles, and it seemed suddenly to have suggested itself to her to lay this on a table near the door. The stick fell off again, and some moments elapsed while she picked it up from the floor. When she turned, her veil had slipped from the brim of her hat down over her face.

‘But it could not have been a surprise to

him,' she said quietly. 'He must have known that there would probably be something of the sort sent home.'

'Yes, yes. But you know, dear, how keenly he feels everything. These highly-strung, artistic temperaments——But I need not tell you; you know Arthur almost as well as I do.'

Dora answered nothing. It was not the first time that Mrs. Agar had charged some remark with that weight of significance which, in her vulgar-minded subtlety, she considered delicate and exceptionally clever. And each time that Dora heard it she was conscious of a vague discomfort, as at the approach of some danger, of some interference in her life which would be too strong for her to resist. It was one of those mean feminine thrusts to

parry which is to acknowledge, to ignore is to admit fear.

‘Has he sent them on to you?’ she asked after a little pause, resisting only by a great effort the temptation to look towards the writing-table.

‘Yes,’ was the reply. ‘It appears that they have been in his possession for some time. He kept them back for some reason—I cannot think why.’

Providence is sometimes unexpectedly kind. Had Mrs. Agar been a different woman, had she, perhaps, been a better woman, less aggravating, more discreet, more honourable, she would not have done at this moment precisely that which Dora was silently praying that she would do.

‘Here,’ continued the mistress of Stag-

holme, going to the writing-table, 'is his Diary ; perhaps you would care to look through it ? Poor Jem ! I am afraid it will not be very interesting.'

Dora took the little dark-coloured book, almost indifferently.

'Thanks,' she said. 'It was always an effort to him to write the very shortest letter, was it not ? Papa would like to see it, I know, if I may show it to him.'

Being rather taller than Mrs. Agar she could see over that lady's shoulder as she stood turning over with some curiosity a score or so of bundles evidently containing letters.

'These,' said Mrs. Agar, 'seem to be letters, probably our letters to him. Shall we burn them ?'

Dora reflected for a moment. She knew

that many of the bundles must contain letters from herself to Jem—letters which could have been read from the housetops without conveying anything to the populace. But some of them—almost between the lines—had been intended to convey, and had conveyed, something to Jem. She reflected—without anger, as women do on such matters—that if curiosity moved her, Mrs. Agar would not scruple to open all these letters and read them. The packets had evidently not been opened, and a momentary feeling of grateful recognition of Arthur's gentlemanly honour passed through her mind. There was about the faded papers that dim, mysterious odour which ever clings to packages that have been packed in India.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘let us burn them.’

Mrs. Agar seemed to hesitate for a

moment, but it was only for effect. She dreaded the packages, for one of them might contain the will which haunted her.

And so these two women, so very different, from such very different motives, carried the letters to the fire and there they burnt them. In the curling flames Dora saw her own handwriting. She could not understand the suppressed excitement of Mrs. Agar's manner, she only knew that the mistress of Stagholme seemed to be afraid of looking at the burning papers.

When all was consumed both women heaved a sigh of relief.

'There,' said Mrs. Agar, 'I am glad we have been able to save poor Arthur that. These things are so very painful.'

Dora looked rather as if she could not understand why the painful things of life should

be harder for Arthur to bear than for other people. But she said nothing.

‘He will be glad,’ continued Mrs. Agar, ‘to hear that it was you who helped me. I know he would rather that it had been you than anyone.’

All this with the horrid meaning, the sly significance, of her kind ; for there are women for whom there is absolutely nothing sacred in the whole gamut of human feelings. There are women who will talk of things upon which the lips of even the most depraved men are silent.

And with it there was nothing that Dora could take exception to—nothing that she could answer without running the risk of bringing upon herself questions to which she had no reply.

‘Well,’ she said cheerfully, ‘it is done

now, so we can dismiss it from our minds. Of course you know that mother is getting out of hand altogether. I cannot hold her in. Her plans are simply kittenish. She wants to take a flat in town for two months, to take Boulton and one maid, to hire a cook, and to go generally to the bad.'

Mrs. Agar's eyes glistened. She liked to hear of other people seeking excitement because she felt more justified in doing so herself.

'Well, I think she is very sensible. I am sure you all want a change. I feel I do. It is so depressing here all alone with one's thoughts. 'Sister' Cecilia was just saying the other day that I ought to go away to Brighton or somewhere—that I owed it to Arthur.'

'I don't see why you should not pay it to yourself whoever you owe it to,' said Dora.

‘This is an age of going away for changes. Life is like old Martin’s trousers—so patched up with changes that the original pattern has disappeared.’

‘Yes, dear,’ replied Mrs. Agar with a vague laugh. In conversation with Dora she invariably felt clumsy and unable to protect herself, like a stout fencer conscious of many vulnerable outlying points. She did not understand this girl, and never knew which was *carte* and which *tierce*. ‘So you are going away?’

‘I expect so. Mother usually carries through her little schemes, and in his inward soul papa is rather a fast old gentleman. He loves the pavement, and—I don’t object to the shops myself.’

‘Then you will like it?’

‘Oh yes!’ replied Dora, rising to go.

‘ Like Mr. Martin, I am not sure that the old pattern is worth preserving.’

‘ I wish I could go with you,’ said Mrs. Agar, holding up her cheek in an absent way for the farewell kiss ; ‘ I have not been to town for ages.’

‘ Last week,’ amended Dora mentally.

‘ Why not come too ? ’ she said aloud, gathering together stick, basket, and gloves.

‘ There is Arthur,’ replied the lady. ‘ I am afraid he will not care to leave home just now, after so great a blow.’

‘ All the more reason why he should go to town for a little and forget—himself.’

Mrs. Agar smiled sadly and waited for further persuasion. She had fully made up her mind to go to Brighton, but was anxious first that the whole parish should press her to do so against her will.

‘ It will be very nice,’ continued Dora, ‘ to have you to help me to keep my flighty progenitors in order. Now I *must* go.’

With a nod and a light laugh she closed the library door behind her, having apparently forgotten the sadder events of the visit. But in her basket she had the Diary.

CHAPTER XVIII

LIKE SHIPS UPON THE SEA

Be as one that knoweth, and yet holdeth his tongue.

‘AND, of course, you know everyone in the room?’ Dora was saying to her cousin as the orchestra struck suddenly into ‘God bless the Prince of Wales.’

‘Good gracious, no!’ Miss Mazerod replied; and both young ladies stood up to curtsy to the Royal party.

It was the great artistic *soirée* of the year, and crowds of nobodies jostled each other in their mad desire to deceive whosoever might be credulous into the belief that they were somebodies.

‘Of course,’ said Dora, when they were seated again, and the strains of the Welsh air had been suppressed ‘by desire,’ ‘they may be very great swells; I have no doubt they are in their particular way; but they do not look it.’

Miss Mazerod looked round critically.

‘Some of them,’ she said, ‘are framemakers, a good many of them, with big bills in high places. Others are actresses—very great actresses off the stage. Do you see that tall girl there, with a supercilious expression which she does not know is apt to remind one of a housemaid scorning a milkman’s love on the area steps? She is a great actress, who will not take small engagements, and is not offered large ones. She is an actress “pour se faire photographeur.”’

‘And this is the cream of London

society ?' said Dora, looking round her with considerable amusement.

'Society,' returned her cousin, 'is not allowed to stand for cream now. It is stirred up with a spoon, silver-gilt, and the skim milk gets hopelessly mixed up with the cream. That young man who is now talking to the actress person is not what he looks. He is, as a matter of fact, the scion of a noble house, who models in clay atrociously.'

'And the gorgeous person he is turning his back upon ?'

'One of his models.'

'Of clay ?'

'Essentially so.'

And Miss Mazerod broke off into a happy laugh. Hers was not the bitterness of plainness or insignificance, but something infinitely more suggestive. It was, indeed, not bitter-

ness at all, but light-hearted contempt, which is, perhaps, the deepest contempt there is.

‘Who is the wretched woman with no backbone, draped in rusty black?’ asked Dora.

‘My dear! That is one of the great lady artists of the age. She lectures to factory girls or something, and she paints limp females snuffling over tiger-lilies. Her ideal woman has that sort of droop of the throat—I imagine she tries to teach it to the factory. She objects to backbone.’

Miss Mazerod, who possessed a very firm little specimen of the adjunct mentioned, drew herself up and smiled commiseratingly.

‘Then,’ said Dora, ‘I feel quite consoled about my sketches.’

For the first time Miss Mazerod looked serious.

Dora,' she said, ' I often wonder whether it would be profane to mention in one's prayers a little gratitude for not having an artistic soul. There are lots of women like that in the world, especially in London. They pretend that they think themselves superior to men, but they know in their hearts that they are inferior to women. For they have not something that women ought to have—— No, Dolly, no brown studies here; you must not dream here!'

Dora, with a light laugh, came back from her mental wanderings to find herself looking at a face which caught her attention at once. It was the face of a man—brown, self-contained, with unhappy eyes and a long drooping nose.

' Who is *that* man ?' she inquired at once. ' Now, he is quite different from the rest. He

is about the only person who is not furtively finding out how much attention he has succeeded in attracting.'

'Yes, that is a man with a purpose.'

'What purpose?' inquired Dora.

'I don't know; I shouldn't think anyone knows.'

'*He* knows,' suggested Dora.

'Yes, *he* knows.'

Miss Mazerod was looking at the mechanism of her fan with a demure expression on lips shaped for happiness. A dark young man was elbowing his way through the mixed crowd towards them.

'What is his name?' asked Dora, who was still looking at the man with a purpose

'General Seymour Michael.'

'The Indian man?'

'Yes.'

There was a little pause, during which Miss Mazerod glanced in the direction of the younger man, who had been detained by a stout lady with a purple dress and a depressed daughter.

‘I should like to know him,’ said Dora.

‘Nothing easier,’ replied her cousin, still absorbed in the fan. ‘I know him quite well.’

‘He is looking at you now.’

Miss Mazerod looked up and bowed with a little jerk, as if she felt too young to be stately; one of those bows that say ‘Come here.’

At this moment the younger man came up and shook hands effusively with Dora, slowly with Miss Mazerod.

‘Jack,’ said that young lady, ‘I have just beamed on General Michael, who is behind you. I want to introduce him to Dora.’

Jack seemed to think this an excellent idea, and stepped aside with alacrity.

Seymour Michael came forward with his pleasant smile. He certainly was one of the most distinguished-looking men in the room, with a brilliant ribbon across his breast, and that smart, well-brushed general effect which stamps the successful soldier.

‘When did you come back to England?’ inquired Edith Mazerod, whose father had worked with this man in India.

‘I—oh! I have been home six months,’ he replied, shaking hands with a subtle *em-pressement* which was more effective than words.

‘On leave?’

‘No. Laid on the shelf.’

He stood upright, drawing himself up with ironical emphasis, as if to show as plainly

as possible that there were many years of life and work in him yet.

Edith Mazerod laughed, the careless passing laugh of inattention.

‘Dora,’ she said, ‘may I introduce General Michael? My cousin.’

She rose, and Seymour Michael prepared to take the vacant seat. The youth called Jack was making signs with his eyebrows, and in attempting to decipher his meaning she forgot to mention Dora’s name.

‘You will be sorry for this,’ said Seymour Michael, sitting down. ‘You will not thank your cousin.’

‘Why?’ inquired Dora, prepared to like him, possibly because he had a brown face and wore his hair cut short.

‘Because,’ he replied, ‘I am hopelessly new to this work.’

‘So am I,’ replied Dora; ‘I don’t even know what pictures to look at and what to ignore. So I dare not look at the walls at all.’

‘That is precisely my position, only I am worse. You know how to behave in polite circles. I don’t. You have a slightly tired look, as if this sort of thing wearied you by reason of its monotony.’

‘Have I? I am sorry for that.’

‘No, there is no reason to be sorry. They all have it.’

‘But,’ protested Dora, ‘I am not one of them. I am only aping the Romans.’

‘You do it well; I shall study your method. You do it better than Edith Mazerod.’

‘Edith is young—hopelessly, enviably young. Do you know them well?’

‘Yes, I knew them in India.’

‘Of course ; I forgot.’

He turned and looked at her sharply. Sometimes his own reputation, far from being a happiness, gave him cause for misgiving. A man with an unclean record cannot well be sure that all the details he would wish suppressed have been suppressed. There was a little pause, during which they both watched the self-satisfied throng moving in and out, here and there, full of a restless desire to be observed.

It was Seymour Michael who spoke first. True to his mixed blood he sought to make himself safe.

‘Excuse me,’ he said, ‘but Edith Mazerod did not mention your name ; may I ask it ?’

‘Dora Glynde !’

She saw him start. She saw a sudden

wavering gleam in his eyes which in another man she would have set down to fear.

‘Miss Dora Glynde,’ he repeated; and the expression of his face was so serene again that the look which had passed away from it began already to present itself to her memory as a conception of her own brain.

‘When I was younger and shyer,’ he said with a singular haste, ‘I was afraid to ask a lady her name when I did not catch it, and—and I frequently regretted not having had the courage to do so.’

She recollected it all afterwards—every word, every pause. But then, as so frequently happens, knowledge aided her memory, and added significance to every detail.

‘Are you staying with the Mazerods?’ he asked.

‘Yes. I am being shown life. I am

doing a season. To-night is part of my education. To-morrow, I believe, we go to Hurlingham ; the next day to a charity bazaar, and so on. I believe I am getting on very well. Aunt Mary is pleased with me. But I still stare about me, and show visible disappointment when I am presented to a literary celebrity or some other person of newspaper renown.'

'Celebrities in the flesh *are* disappointing.'

'Not only that, but I find that many of them are just a little common. Not quite what we in the country call gentlemen.'

'Ah ! Miss Glynde, you forget that Art rises superior to class distinctions.'

'Yes, but artists don't ; and artists' wives don't rise at all. I think you are to be congratulated. In your profession there are fewer persons "superior to class distinction."'

This was a subject which Seymour Michael dreaded. He was ignorant of how much Dora might know. He had suspected from the first that Jem Agar's desire that she should know the truth had been a mere matter of sentiment ; but the fact of meeting her at this public festivity, gay and in colours, shook this theory from its foundation. He disliked Edith Mazerod, because he suspected that his own early career had probably been discussed in her hearing, and her easy lightness of heart was to him as incomprehensible as it was suspicious. Dora he rather feared without knowing why.

‘I suppose you know India well?’ she said, looking straight in front of her.

‘Too well,’ was the reply, with a sharp sidelong glance.

He was right. At that moment Dora

might have been one of these *habituées* of rout and ball-room. She was very pale and looked tired out.

‘ I went out there thirty years ago,’ he continued, ‘ into the Mutiny. From that time to this India has been killing my friends.’

There was a little pause. She knew that in the natural course of events it was almost certain that this man knew Jem personally. It would have been easy to mention his name ; but the wound was too fresh, her heart was too sore to bear the sting of hearing him discussed.

For a second Seymour Michael hovered on the brink. His lips almost framed the name. Good almost triumphed over evil.

And the girl sitting there—broken-hearted, quiet and strong, as only women can be—never knew how near she was. Sometimes

it seems as if the cruelty of fate were unnecessary, as if the word too little or the word too much, which has the power to alter a whole life, were withheld or spoken merely to further a Providential experiment.

‘Yes,’ said Michael, ‘I hate India.’

And the spell was broken, the moment lost for ever. Seymour Michael had kept silence, and elsewhere, perhaps, at that very moment his doom was spoken. Who can tell? We are offered chances, we are, if you will, the puppets of an experiment, and surely there must be a moment which decides.

Dora was conscious of having miscalculated her own strength. She had led him on to the dangerous ground, but it was with relief that she saw him step back. She did not dare to lead him to it again.

It was not long before he left her, on the timely arrival of another friend.

The introduction brought about by Miss Mazerod did not seem to have been an entire success, for they parted gravely and without a word expressing the hope of meeting again. And yet Dora liked him, for he was strong and purposeful, such as she would have had all men. She wanted to know more of him. She wanted to be admitted further into the knowledge which she knew to be his.

Seymour Michael was conscious of a feeling of discomfort, no less disquieting by reason of its vagueness. He had a nervous sensation of being surrounded by something—something in the nature of a chain, piecing itself together, link by link—something that was slowly closing in upon him.

CHAPTER XIX

AT HURLINGHAM

I must be cruel only to be kind.

It is not your deep person who succeeds in carrying out a set purpose, but one who is just profound enough to be fathomed of the multitude. For, after all, the multitude is ready enough to help, in a casual, parenthetical way, in the furtherance of a design ; and a little depth, serving to flatter that vanity which taketh delight in a sense of superior perspicacity, only adds to the zest. There are plenty of people ready to pull on a rope or shove at a wheel, but there are more

eager to do so if they are offered the direction of affairs.

Mrs. Glynde was one of those easily-fathomed persons who often succeed in their designs by the very transparency of their method. She had come to London with the purpose of leaving Dora there under the care of her sister Lady Mazerod, and before she had talked to that amiable widow for half an hour the design was as apparent as if it had been spoken.

In due course Dora and Miss Mazerod renewed a childish love, and at the end of April Mr. and Mrs. Glynde went back to Stagholme alone. It is probable that neither Mrs. Glynde nor Providence could have chosen a better companion for Dora at this time than Edith Mazerod. There was a breezy simplicity about this young lady's

view of life which seemed to have the power of simplifying life itself. There are some people like this to whom is vouchsafed a limited comprehension of evil and an unlimited belief in good. A very shrewd author, who is, perhaps, not so much read to-day as he ought to be, said that 'to the pure all things are pure.' He often said less than he meant. For he knew as well as we do that the pure-minded are just so many moral filters who clear the atmosphere and take no harm themselves.

Dora Glynde required someone like this ; for she had, as the French say, 'found herself.' The little world of Stagholme—the world of this record—was intensely human. There was nobody very good in it and nobody very bad. Jem, with that quicker perception of evil which is wisely included in

the mental outfit of men, had warned her against 'Sister' Cecilia. And she had begun to understand his meaning now. Mrs. Agar she had found out for herself. Her father she respected and loved, but she had reached that age wherein we discover that father and mother are but as other men and women. Her mother she loved with that half-patronising affection which is found where a daughter is mentally superior.

The only person whom she had ever really respected and looked up to without reserve was Jem.

Altogether life was too complicated, subtle, difficult, hopeless when Edith Mazeroth came into it, and by her presence seemed to clear the atmosphere of daily existence.

At first the constant round of visiting

and gaiety was a supreme effort ; then came tolerance, and finally that business-like acceptance which is mistaken by many for enjoyment. The human machine is not constructed to go always at high pressure either in happiness or in misery. We cannot live all day and all night with a living care on our shoulders—the greatest misery slips off sometimes. With men it can be lubricated by hard work and likewise by alcohol, but the latter method is not always to be advised. With women there is much consolation to be extracted from a new dress or several new dresses and a hat. Even a new pair of gloves may help a breaking heart, and a glass of bitter beer taken at the right moment (with or without faith) has power to change a man's view of life.

So Dora, who had at no time been tragic,

began to find that Academy *soirées* and similar entertainments assisted her in preserving towards the world that attitude which she had elected to assume. And if there be any who blame her, they are at liberty to do so. It is not worth while to pause for the purpose of writing—on the ground or elsewhere—for their edification.

Only one such alleviation did she repent of in after life. The day after the Academy *soirée* the Mazerods took her to Hurlingham. And Hurlingham became one of the pages of her life which she would have wished to tear completely out.

When they drove in through the simple gateway and round by the winding drive it was evident that a great afternoon was to be expected. The blue-and-white club flag fluttered over a pavilion crammed from roof to

terrace. The teams were already out in their bright colours, curveting about, each with a practice ball, on their stiff little ponies, moving with that singular cramped action only seen on the polo ground.

It was one of those brilliant days in early May when only gardeners, grumbling, talk or think of rain. A few fleecy white clouds seemed painted, so motionless were they, on the sky, reproducing the Hurlingham colours far above the ground. A gentle breeze coming up from the river brought with it the odour of lilac and budding things.

The chairs were crowded with a well-dressed throng, the larger majority of which seemed to be unaware that polo was the object of the afternoon.

The Mazerods and Dora had scarcely taken chairs when Arthur Agar presented

himself. His tailor had apparently told him that after a lapse of six months it was permissible to assume habiliments of a slightly resigned tenor. His grey suit was one of the most elegant on the ground, his Suède gloves fitted perfectly, his tie was unique. And Arthur Agar was as happy as the best-dressed girl there.

The reception accorded him was not exactly enthusiastic. Having in view the fact that the young man called Jack was entirely satisfactory, Lady Mazerod treated all other young men with indifference. Edith despised Arthur Agar because Jack was athletic in his tendencies; and Dora was sorry to see him, because she had not answered his three last letters. There were also numerous small but expensive presents for which she had failed to tender thanks.

Unfortunately the young man called Jack turned up at tea-time, carrying one of the heavy chairs, which never fail to spoil the gloves of some of us, with unconscious ease. Owing to the activity and enterprise of this young gentleman tea was soon procured, and consequently despatched before the interval was over and before the band had wet its whistle with something of a different nature from that in vogue on the lawn. A stroll through the gardens was proposed, and Lady Mazerod sent the young people off alone. There was no choice ; but Dora had probably no thought of making a choice had such been offered to her. She, like many another young lady, erred in placing too great a confidence in her own powers of staving things off.

There was no doubt whatever about

Edith and the energetic John. They led the way round by the river path and the tennis-courts with a sublime disregard for the eye of the multitude, leaving Dora and Arthur to follow at such speed as their discretion might dictate.

Before they had left the tennis-lawn Arthur plunged. It may have been the desperation of diffidence, or perhaps that the new grey suit and the unique tie lent him confidence. One sees a young lady completely carried off her mental status by the success of a dress or the absence of a dreaded competitor, and Arthur Agar had enough of the woman in him to give way to this dangerous vertigo.

‘Dora,’ he said, ‘you have not answered my last three letters.’

‘No,’ she replied, ‘because they struck me as a little ridiculous.’

‘Ridiculous!’ he repeated, with such sincere dismay that she was moved to compassion. ‘Ridiculous, Dora, why?’

His horror-struck, almost tearful voice gave her a pang of self-reproach, as if she had struck some defenceless dumb animal.

‘Well, there were things in them that I did not understand.’

‘But I could make you understand them,’ he said, with a sudden self-assertion which startled her. The weakest man is, after all, a man—so far as women are concerned.

‘I think you had better not,’ she said, hurrying her steps.

But he refused to alter his pace, and he disregarded her warning.

‘They meant,’ he said, ‘that I wanted you to know that I love you.’

There was a little pause. Dora was struck dumb by a chill sense of foreboding. It was like a momentary glance into a future full of trouble.

‘I am sorry,’ she said, ‘for that. I hope—that you may find that it is a mistake.’

‘But it is not a mistake. I don’t see why it should be one.’

Dora paused. She was afraid to strike. She did not know yet that it is less cruel to be cruel at once.

‘It is best to look at these things practically,’ she said. ‘And if we look at it practically we shall find that you and I are not at all likely to be happy together.’

‘However I look at it, I only see that I should never be happy without you.’

‘Then, Arthur, you are not looking at it practically.’

‘No, and I don’t want to,’ he replied doggedly.

‘That is a mistake. A little bit of life may not be practical, but all the rest of it is; and for the gratification of that little bit, there is all the rest to be lived through.’

Arthur looked puzzled. He rearranged the orchid in his coat before replying. He had found time to think of the orchid.

‘I don’t understand all that,’ he said. ‘I only know that I love you, and that I should be miserable without you. Besides, if that little bit is love—— I suppose you admit there is such a thing as love?’

Dora winced. She was looking through the trees across the peaceful evening river.

‘Yes,’ she answered gently. ‘I suppose so.’

Arthur Agar had been brought up in an atmosphere of futile discussion, but he had never wanted anything in vain. There are women—fools—who dare to bring up children thus in a world where wanting in vain is the chief characteristic of daily life. Arthur was ready enough to go on discussing his future thus, but never doubted that it would all come to his desire in the end. He was like a woman in so much as he failed to understand an argument which he could not meet.

They walked on amidst the flowering shrubs, and Dora was filled with a disquieting sense of having failed to convince him.

‘I do not want to hurry you,’ said Arthur presently, with a maddening equanimity.

‘ You can give me your answer some other time.’

‘ But I have given it now.’

Arthur was engaged in taking off his hat to a passing lady, and made no acknowledgment of this.

‘ Everybody at home would be pleased,’ he observed, after a pause occupied by the adjustment of his hat. ‘ They all want it.’

It was not that he refused to take No when it was given to him, but rather that he did not recognise it, never having encountered it before.

They were now coming round by the pigeon-shooting enclosure, and the strains of the band announced that the interval for tea had elapsed.

In the distance Lady Mazerod and Edith, attended by the indefatigable Jack, were

keeping a chair for Dora. She slackened her pace. To her the knowledge had come that the difficulties of life have usually to be met single-handed. She was not afraid of Arthur, but this was a distinct difficulty because of the influence he had at his back.

‘Arthur,’ she said, ‘I think we had better understand each other *now*. It may save us both something in the future. I cannot help feeling rather sorry that I must say No. Every girl must feel that. I do not know from whence the feeling comes. It is a sort of regret, as if something good and valuable were being wasted. But, Arthur, it *is* No, and it must always be No. I am not the sort of person to change.’

‘I suppose,’ he replied, *en vrai fils de sa mère*, ‘that there is someone else?’

He turned as he spoke, but Dora's parasol was too quick for him.

'Please do not let us be like people in books,' she said. 'There is no necessity to go into side issues at all. You have asked me to marry you. I can never marry you. There is the whole question and the whole answer. I say nothing to you about finding somebody worthier, or any nonsense of that sort. Please spare me the usual—impertinences—about there being somebody else.'

The word found its mark. Arthur Agar caught his breath, but made no answer.

They were among the well-dressed throng now crowding back to the chairs.

When Arthur had handed Dora over to the care of Lady Mazerod he lifted his hat and took his departure with that perfect *savoir faire* which was his forte.

CHAPTER XX

IN A SIDE PATH

‘To sum up all, he has the worst fault a husband can have—he’s not my choice.’

THERE is something doubtful in a love-making that is in more than two pairs of hands. This is a day of syndicates. The strength that lies in union is cultivated nowadays with much assiduity. But in matters of love the case is not yet altered, and never will be. It is a matter for two people to decide between themselves, and all interference is mistaken and deplorable. It is usually, one notices, those persons who are

incapable of the feeling themselves who seek to interfere in the affairs of others.

That one of the principals should seek aid in such interference proves without appeal that he does not know his business. Such aid as this Arthur Agar had sought. He had, as Dora suspected, written to his mother, with full particulars of the conversation beneath the Hurlingham trees. He had laid before her many arguments, which, by reason of their effeminacy, appealed to her illogical mind, proving that Dora could not do better than marry him. The arrangement, he argued, was satisfactory from whatever point of view it might be taken ; and, finally, he begged his mother to try and succeed where he had failed. He did not propose that Mrs. Agar should appeal to Dora ; not because such a course was re-

pellent, but merely because he knew a better. He suggested that Mrs. Agar should sound Mr. Glynde upon the matter.

This suggestion was in itself a stroke of diplomacy. The astute have no doubt found out by this time that the Reverend Thomas Glynde loved money ; and a man who loves money has not the makings of a good father within him, whatever else he may have. Whether Arthur was aware of this it would be hard to say. Whether he had the penetration to know that in the nature of things Mr. Glynde would urge Dora to marry Arthur Agar and Stagholme without due regard to her own feelings in the matter, is a question upon which no man can give a reliable opinion. Certain it is that such a course was precisely what the Reverend Thomas had marked out for himself.

He had an exaggerated respect for money and position—a title was a thing to be revered. Clergymen, like artists, are dependent on patronage, and must swallow their pride. It is, therefore, perhaps only natural that Mr. Glynde should be quite prepared to make some sacrifice of feeling or sentiment (especially the feeling and sentiment of another) in order to secure a position.

Arthur Agar simply followed the spirit of the age. He could not succeed alone, and therefore he proceeded to form a syndicate to compel Dora to love him, or in the meantime to marry him.

‘Of course,’ said ‘Sister’ Cecilia to Mrs. Agar, when the matter was first under discussion, ‘she would soon learn to care for him. Women *always* do.’

Which shows how much 'Sister' Cecilia knew about it.

'And besides, I believe she cares for him already,' added Mrs. Agar, who never did things by halves.

'Sister' Cecilia dropped her head on one side and looked convinced—to order.

'Of course,' pursued Mrs. Agar vaguely, 'I am very fond of Dora; no one could be more so. But I must confess that I do not always understand her.'

Even to 'Sister' Cecilia it would not do to confess that she was afraid of her.

The interview was easily brought about. Mrs. Agar wrote a note to the Rector and asked him to luncheon. The Rector, who had not had many legal affairs to settle during his uneventful life, was always pleased

to be consulted upon a subject of which he knew absolutely nothing. Besides, they gave one a good luncheon at Stagholme in those days.

‘I have had a letter from dear Arthur,’ said Mrs. Agar at a moment which she deemed propitious, namely, after a third glass of the Stagholme brown sherry.

‘Ah, I hope he is well? The boy is not strong.’

‘Yes, he is quite well, thank you. But of course he has had a great shock, and one cannot expect him to get over it all at once.’

The Rector did not hold much by sentiment, so he contented himself with a grave sip of sherry.

‘And now I am afraid there is fresh trouble,’ added Mrs. Agar.

‘Been running into debt?’ suggested Mr. Glynde.

‘No, it is not that. No, it is Dora.’

‘Dora! what has Dora been doing?’

Mrs. Agar was polishing the rim of a silver salt-cellar with her forefinger.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘I have seen it going on for a long time. My poor boy has always—well, he has always admired Dora.’

‘Oh!’

‘Yes, and of course I should like nothing better. I am sure they would be most happy.’

The Rector looked doubtful.

‘We must not forget,’ he said, ‘that Arthur is constitutionally delicate. That extreme repugnance to active exercise, the love of ease and—er—indoor pursuits, show a tendency to enfeeble the organisation which

might—I don't say it will, but it might—turn to decline.'

'But the doctors say that he is quite strong. Everybody cannot be robust and—and massive.'

She was thinking of Jem, against whom she had always borne a grudge because his inoffensive presence alone had the power of making Arthur look puny.

'No, and of course with care one may hope that Arthur will live to a ripe old age,' said the Rector, who was only coquetting with the question.

Mrs. Agar played with a biscuit. She had a rooted aversion to the query direct.

'I should have thought,' she said, 'that you or her mother would have seen that such an attachment was likely to form itself.'

The truth was that the Reverend

Thomas did not devote very much thought to any subject which did not directly influence his own well-being. He had at one time thought that an attachment between Jem and Dora might conveniently result from a childhood's friendship, but Arthur had not entered into his prognostications at all. He rather despised the youth, as much on his own account as that he was Anna Agar's son.

‘Can’t say,’ he replied, ‘that the thing ever entered my head. Of course, if the young people have settled it all between themselves, I suppose we must give them our blessing, and be thankful that we have been saved further trouble.’

He thought it rather strange that Dora should have fixed her affections on such an unlikely object as Arthur Agar ; but it was

part of his earthly creed that the feelings of women are as incomprehensible as they are unimportant. Which, by the way, serves to show how very little the Rector of Stagholme knew of the world.

‘But,’ protested Mrs. Agar, ‘they have *not* settled it between themselves. That is just it.’

‘Just what?’

‘Just the difficulty.’

Immediately Mr. Glynde’s face fell to its usual degree of set depression.

‘What do they want me to do?’ he inquired, with that air of resignation which is in reality no resignation at all.

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Agar volubly, ‘it appears that Arthur spoke to Dora at Hurlingham, and for some reason she said No. I can’t understand it at all. I am sure she

has always appeared to like him very much. It may have been some passing fancy or something, you know. When she is told that it would please us all, perhaps she will change her mind. Poor Arthur is terribly cut up about it. Of course a man in his position does not quite expect to be treated cavalierly like that.'

Mr. Glynde smiled. Behind the parson there was somewhat even better ; there was a just and honest English gentleman, which, in the way of human species, is very hard to beat.

'I am afraid Arthur will have to manage such affairs for himself. When a girl is settling a question involving her whole life she does not usually pause to consider the position of the man who asks her to be his wife. He would have no business to ask

her had he no position, and the rest is merely a matter of degrees.'

'Then you don't care about the match?' said Mrs. Agar, to whose mind the earliest rudiments of logic were incomprehensible.

'I do not say that,' replied the Rector, with the patience of a man who has had dealings with women all his life; 'but I should like it to be understood that Dora is quite free to choose for herself. I am willing to tell her that the match would be satisfactory to me. Arthur is a gentleman, which is saying a good deal in these days. He is affectionate, and, so far as I know, a dutiful son. I have little doubt he would make a good husband.'

Mrs. Agar wiped away an obvious tear, which ran off Mr. Glynde's mental epidermis like water off the back of the proverbial

fowl. This also he had learnt in the course of his dealings with the world.

‘He has been a good son to me,’ sniffed the fond and foolish mother.

Neither of these persons was capable of understanding that ‘goodness’ is not all we want in husband or wife. These good husbands—heaven help their wives!—break as many hearts as those who are labelled by the world with the black ticket.

‘Then I may tell Arthur that you will help him?’ said Mrs. Agar, with a sudden access of practical energy.

‘You may tell him that he has my good wishes, and that I will point out to Dora the advantages of—of acceding to his desire. There are, of course, advantages on both sides, we know that.’

As usual, Mrs. Agar overdid things.

The airiness of her indifference might have deceived a child of eight, provided that its intellect was not *de première force*.

‘Ye-es,’ she murmured, ‘I suppose Dora would bring her little—eh—subscription towards the household expenses. ‘Sister’ Cecilia gave me to understand that there was a little something coming to her under her mother’s marriage settlement.’

Mrs. Agar was not clever enough to see that she had made a mistake. The mention of ‘Sister’ Cecilia’s name acted on the Rector like a mental douche. He was just beginning to give way to expansiveness—probably under the suave influence of the brown sherry—and the name of ‘Sister’ Cecilia pulled him together with a jerk. The jerk extended to his features ; but Mrs. Agar was one of those cunning women whom no man

need fear. She was so cunning that she deceived herself into seeing that which she wished to see, and nothing else.

‘All that,’ said the Rector gravely, ‘can be discussed when Arthur has persuaded Dora to say Yes.’

He was in the position of an unfortunate person who, having come into controversy with the police, is warned that every word he says may be used in evidence against him. He had been reminded that every detail of the present conversation would be repeated to ‘Sister’ Cecilia, with embellishments or subtractions as might please the narrator’s fancy or suit her purpose.

‘A dangerous woman’ he called ‘Sister’ Cecilia in his most gloomy voice, and a parson must perforce fear dangerous women. That is one of the trials of the ministry.

Mrs. Agar laughed in a forced manner.

‘Of course,’ she said—she had a habit of beginning her remarks with these two words—‘of course, we need not think of such questions yet. I am sure all *I* want is the happiness of the dear children.’

‘Umph!’ ejaculated Mr. Glynde, who was not always a model of politeness.

‘That, I am sure,’ continued Mrs. Agar with a dabbing pocket-handkerchief, ‘is the dearest wish of us all.’

‘When does the boy come home?’ inquired the Rector.

‘Oh, in a week. I am so longing for him to come. He has to go to town to get some clothes, which will delay his return by one night.’

‘Is he doing any good this term?’

Mrs. Agar looked slightly hurt.

‘ Well, he always works very hard. I am only afraid that he should overdo it. You know, I suppose, that he did not get through his examination this term. Of course it is no good *my* saying anything, but I am quite convinced that they are not dealing fairly by him. I have seen some of those examination papers, and some of the questions are simply spiteful. They do it on purpose, I know. And ‘ Sister ’ Cecilia tells me that that *does* happen sometimes. For some reason or other—because they have been snubbed, or something like that—the masters, the examiners, or whatever they are called, make a dead set at some men, and simply keep them back. They don’t give them the marks that they ought to have. Why should Arthur always fail? Of course the thing is unfair.’

This theory was not quite new to the Rector. He had given up arguing about it, and usually took refuge in flight. He did so on this occasion. But as he walked home across the park, smoking a cigarette, he reflected that to the owner of Stagholme such a small matter as a college career was, after all, of no importance. These broad acres, the stately forests, the grand old house, raised Arthur Agar above such considerations, indeed, above most considerations. And Mr. Glynde made up his mind to put it very strongly to Dora.

CHAPTER XXI

ALONE

The name of the slough was Despond.

WHEN Dora returned to Stagholme a fortnight later she was relieved to find that Arthur had not yet come down from Cambridge.

It is a strange thing that in the spring-time those who are happy—*pro tempore*, of course, we know all that—are happier, while those who carry something with them find the burden heavier. Stagholme in the spring came as a sort of shock to Dora. There were certain adjuncts to the growth of

things which gave her actual pain. After dinner, the first night, she walked across the garden to the beech-wood, but before long she came back again. There is a scent in beech forests in the spring which is like no other scent on earth, and Dora found that she could not stand it.

Her father and mother were sitting in the drawing-room with open windows, for it was a warm May that year. She came in through the falling curtains, and something warned her to keep her face averted from the furtive glance of her mother's eyes. She had learnt something of the world during her brief season in town, and one of the lessons had been that the world sees more than is often credited to it.

‘The worst,’ she said cheerfully, ‘of a season in town is that it makes one feel aged

and experienced. Middle-age came upon me suddenly, just now, in the garden.'

Mr. Glynde was looking at her almost critically over his newspaper.

'How old are you?' he asked curtly.

'Twenty-five.'

In some indefinite way the question jarred horribly. Dora was conscious of a faint doubt in the infallibility of her father's judgment. She knew that in a worldly sense he was more experienced, more thoughtful, cleverer than her mother, but in some ways she inclined towards the maternal opinion on questions connected with herself.

At this moment Mrs. Glynde was called from the room, and went reluctantly, feeling that the time was unpropitious.

Mr. Glynde's life had been eminently uneventful. Prosperous, happy in a half-

hearted almost negative way, somewhat selfish, he had never known hardship, had never faced adversity. It is such men as this who love what they call a serious talk, summoning the subject thereof with exaggerated gravity to a study, making a point of the *mise en scène*, and finally saying nothing that could not have been spoken in course of ordinary conversation.

Dora detected the odour of a serious talk in the atmosphere, and she found that something had taken away the awe which such conversations had hitherto inspired. It may have been the season in town, but it was more probably that confidence which comes from the knowledge of the world. There were things in life of which she consciously knew more than her father, and one of these was sorrow. There is nothing that gives so

much confidence as the knowledge that the worst possible has happened. It raises one above the petty worries of daily existence.

Dora knew that her acquaintance with sorrow was more intimate, more thorough than that of her father, who sat looking as if the hangman were at the door. She awaited the serious talk with some apprehension, but none of that almost paralysing awe which she had known in childhood.

‘I am getting an old man,’ he said with supreme egotism, ‘and you cannot expect to have me with you much longer.’

‘But I do expect it,’ replied Dora cheerfully. ‘I am sorry to disappoint you, papa, but I do expect it most decidedly.’

This rather spoilt the lugubrious gravity of the situation.

‘Well, thank Heaven! I am a hearty

man yet,' admitted the Rector rather more hopefully; 'but still you cannot expect to have your parents with you all your life, you know.'

'I think it is wiser not to look too far into the future,' replied Dora, warding off.

'I should look much more happily into the future,' replied the Rector, with the deliberation of the domestic autocrat, 'if I knew that you had a good husband to take care of you.'

In a flash of thought Dora traced it all back to Arthur, through Mrs. Agar; and her would-be lover fell still further in her estimation. He seemed to be fated to show himself at every turn the very anti-type to her ideal.

'Ah,' she laughed, 'but suppose I got a bad one? You are always saying that

marriage is a lottery, and I don't believe the remark is original. Suppose I drew a blank ; fancy being married to a blank ! Or I might do worse. I might draw minus something—minus brains, for instance. They are in the lottery, for I have seen them, nicely done up in a faultless wrapper—both blanks and worse.'

She turned away towards the window, and the moment her face was averted it changed suddenly. The face that looked out towards the beech-wood, where the shadows were creeping from the darkening East, was piteous, terror-stricken, driven.

It is an ever-living question why people—honest, well-meaning parents and others—should be set to ride roughshod over all that is best and purest in the human mind.

The Rector went on, in his calmly self-

satisfied voice, with a fatuous ignorance of what he was doing which must have made the very angels wince.

‘A great many girls,’ he said, ‘have thrown away a chance of happiness merely to serve a passing fancy. Mind you don’t do that.’

She gave a little laugh, quite natural and easy ; but her face was grave, and more.

‘I do not think there is any fear of that,’ she replied lightly. ‘You must confess, papa, that I have always displayed a remarkable capacity for the management of my own affairs—with the assistance of “Sister” Cecilia, *bien entendu*.’

This was rather a forlorn hope, but Dora was driven into a corner. The Rector was in the habit of preaching a good methodical sermon, and usually finished up somewhere in

the neighbourhood of the text from whence he started. He allowed himself to deviate, but he never turned his back upon his text and went for a vague ramble through scriptural meadows, as some have been heard to do. He deviated on this occasion for a moment, but never lost sight of the main question.

‘“Sister” Cecilia,’ he said, ‘is a busybody, and, like all busybodies, a fool. It is always people who cannot manage their own affairs who are so anxious to help their neighbours. I have no doubt that you are as capable of looking after yourself as any girl ; but, child, you must remember that experience goes a long way in the world, and in the nature of things I must know better than you.’

‘Of course you do, papa dear. I know that.’

But she did not know it, and he knew that she did not. This knowledge is certain to come sooner or later to men and women who have lived for themselves and in themselves alone. They are mental hermits, whose opinion of things connected with the lives of others cannot well be of value, because they have only studied their own existences.

The Rector of Stagholme suddenly became aware of this. He suddenly found that his advice was no longer law. There are plenty of us ready to confess that we cannot play billiards or whist or polo, but no man likes it to be known that he cannot play the game of life. Mr. Glynde did not like this subtle feeling of incompetency. He prided himself on being a man of the world, and frequently applied the vague term to himself. We are all men of a world, but it

depends upon the size of that world as to what value our citizenship may be. Mr. Glynde's world had always been the Reverend Thomas Glynde. He knew nothing of Dora's world, and lost his way as soon as he set his foot therein. But rather than make inquiries, he thought to support paternal dignity by going further.

‘It is,’ he said with inevitable egotism, ‘unnecessary for me to tell you that I have only your interests at heart.’

‘Quite, papa dear. But do not let us talk about these horrid things. I am quite happy at home, and I do not want to go away from it. There is nowhere in the world where I should sooner be than here, even taking into consideration the fact that you are sometimes the most dismal old gentleman on the face of the earth.’

‘Well,’ he answered with a grim smile, ‘I am sure I have enough to make me dismal. I am thankful to say that there will be no difficulty about money. You will be well enough off to have all that you might desire. But wealth is not all that a woman wants. She cannot turn it to the same account as a man. She wants position, a household, a husband. Otherwise the world only makes use of her ; she is a prey to charity humbugs and bad people who do good works badly. I am not speaking as a parson, but as a man of the world.’

‘Then,’ she said, ‘as a parson, tell me if it would not be wrong to marry a man for whom one did not care, just for the sake of these things—a household and a husband?’

‘Of course it would,’ answered Mr. Glynde. ‘And that is a wrong which is

usually punished in this life. But there are cases where it is difficult to say whether there be love or not. Unless you actually despise or hate a man, you may come to care for him.'

'And in the meantime the position and the advantages mentioned are worth seizing?'

'So says the world,' admitted Mr. Glynde.

'And what says the parson?'

She went to him and laid her two arms upon his broad chest, standing behind him as he sat in his arm-chair, and looking down affectionately upon his averted face.

'And what says the parson?' she repeated, with a loving tap of her fingers on his breast.

'Nothing,' was the reply. 'A better parson than I says that what is natural is right.'

‘ Yes, and that means follow the dictates of your own heart ? ’

‘ I suppose so, ’ admitted the Rector, taking her two hands in his.

‘ And the dictates of my heart are all for staying at home and looking after my ancient parents and worrying them. Am I to be sent away ? Not yet, old gentleman, not yet. ’

The Reverend Thomas Glynde laughed, somewhat as if a weight had been lifted from his heart. In his way he was a conscientious man. It was his honest conviction that Dora would do well to marry Arthur, who was a gentleman, and essentially harmless. In persuading her to do so covertly, as he had thought well to do, he was honestly performing that which he thought to be his duty towards her.

Presently Mrs. Glynde came back, and shortly afterwards Dora left the room. The Rector was not reading the book he held open on his knee, but gazed instead absently at the pattern of the hearthrug.

A change had come in this quiet household. Dora had gone away a child. She had come back a woman, with that consciousness of life which comes somewhere between twenty and thirty years of age. A consciousness which is partly made up of the knowledge that life is, after all, given to each one of us individually to make the best of as well as we may ; and no one knows what that best is except ourselves. What is happiness for one is misery for another, and while human beings vary as the clouds of heaven, no life can be lived by set rule.

Over these things the Rector pondered.

He felt the difference in Dora. She was still his daughter, but no longer a child. Her existence was still his chief care, but he could only stand by and help a little here and there ; for the dependency of childhood was left behind, and her evident intention was to work out her own life in her own way. So do those who are dependent by nature upon the advice and sympathy of others learn to lean only upon their own strength.

In the room overhead, standing by the window with weary eyes, Dora was murmuring :

‘ I wonder—I wonder if I shall be able to hold out against them all ? ’

CHAPTER XXII

ACROSS THE YEARS

Across the years you seem to come.

‘THAT is just what I can’t do. I cannot afford to wait.’

Arthur Agar drew in his neatly-shod little feet, and leant back in the deep chair which was always set aside as his in the Stagholme drawing-room.

Mother and son were alone in the vast, somewhat gloomy apartment. Arthur had been home six hours, and the subject of their conversation was, of course, Dora.

‘Sister’ Cecilia was absent, only in obe-

dience to a very unmistakable hint in one of Arthur's recent letters to his mother.

‘Only a little while,’ pleaded Mrs. Agar. ‘Of course, dear, it will all come right. I feel convinced of that. Only you see, dear, girls do not like to be hurried in such an important step. I am quite sure she cares for you ; only you *must* give her a little time.’

‘But I can't, I can't,’ he repeated anxiously. And his face wore that strangely accentuated look of trouble which almost amounted to dread—dread of something in life which had not come yet.

‘Why not?’ inquired Mrs. Agar. ‘You are both young enough, I am sure.’

‘Oh yes, we are young enough.’

He stirred his tea with an effeminate appreciation of fine Coalport and a dainty Norwegian spoon.

‘Then why should you not wait?’

Arthur was silent ; he looked very small and frail, almost childlike, in his silk-faced evening coat. Spoilt boy was writ large all over his person.

‘Arthur,’ said Mrs. Agar, ‘you are keeping something from me.’

He shook his feeble head feebly.

‘You are, I know you are. What is it?’

This was the only person in all the world who had stirred the heart of Anna Agar to something like a lasting affection. Once—years before—she had loved Seymour Michael with a sudden volcanic passion which had as suddenly turned to hatred. But under no circumstances could such a love have endured. Consistency, constancy, singleness of purpose were quite lacking in this woman’s composition. It is rare, but when a woman

does fail in this respect, her failure is more complete, more miserable than the failure of men, inconstant as they are.

Her affection for Arthur, coupled with that suspicion which always goes with a cheap cunning, had put her on the right scent.

‘Tell me,’ she said, ‘I insist on knowing.’

Still he held his peace, with the obstinate silence of the weak.

‘Well, then,’ she cried, ‘don’t ask me to help you to win Dora, that is all!’

There was a pause ; in the silence of the great house the wind moaned softly. It always moaned in the drawing-room, whether in calm or storm, from some undiscovered draught in the high ventilated ceiling.

‘I sometimes think,’ said Arthur at length, in an awe-struck voice, ‘that Jem may not be dead.’

‘Not dead! Arthur, how can you be so stupid?’

She was not at all awe-struck. Her denser, more sordid nature was proof against the silence or the humming wind. The greed of gain has power to kill superstition.

His face puzzled her. Suddenly he cast himself back and hid his face in his hands.

‘Oh!’ he muttered, ‘I can’t do it, I can’t do it!’

In an instant his mother was standing over him.

‘Arthur,’ she hissed, ‘you *know* something?’

‘Yes,’ he confessed in a whisper at length.

‘Jem is not dead?’ she hissed again. Her voice was hoarse.

‘He was not killed in the disaster,’

admitted Arthur. In his heart he was still clinging to the other hope subtly held out by Seymour Michael—the hope that in his simple intrepidity Jem had gone to his death.

‘Then where is he—where is he, Arthur? Tell me quickly!’

Mrs. Agar was white and breathless. It was as if she had bartered her soul, and after payment, had been tricked out of her share of the bargain. She trembled with a fear which seemed to fill her world and extend to the other world to come.

‘He escaped from that action,’ said Arthur, who, now that the truth was out, grew voluble like a child making a confession, ‘by being sent on in front with a few men. They escaped notice, while the larger body was attacked and massacred.’

‘Who told you this?’

‘I do not know. I cannot tell you his name.’

‘Arthur!’ exclaimed Mrs. Agar nervously, ‘are you going mad? Do you know what you are saying?’

In reply he gave a little laugh like a sob.

‘Oh yes,’ he replied, ‘it is all right. I know what I am saying, though sometimes I scarcely believe it myself. If it was a hundred years ago one might believe it easily enough, but now it seems unreal.’

‘Then where is Jem? Was he taken prisoner? Those men are savages, aren’t they? They kill—people when they take them prisoners.’

‘No, he was not taken prisoner,’ said Arthur. Sometimes he lost patience in a snappy, feminine way with his mother.

‘Oh! tell me, tell me, Arthur dear!
You are killing me!’

‘I will, if you will let me. It appears that Jem had made himself a name out there for knowing the country and the people, which is useful to the Government, because Russia and England both want the country, or something like that; I don’t quite understand it.’

‘Oh, never mind! Go on!’ interrupted Mrs. Agar with characteristic impatience.

‘And at any rate the men on the other side—the Russians or someone, I don’t know who—were in the habit of watching Jem so as to prevent his going up into this unexplored country. Well, when the report of his death was put in the newspapers it was left uncontradicted, so that these men should think he was dead, and not be

on the look-out for him. Do you understand?’

Mrs. Agar had raised her head, with listening, attentive eyes. It seemed as if a voice had come to her across the years from the distant past. A voice telling an old story, which had never been forgotten, but merely laid aside in the memory among those things that never are forgotten.

Finding Arthur's troubled gaze upon her, she seemed to recollect herself with a little gesture of her hand to her breast as if breathing were difficult.

‘That does not sound like a thing Jem would do,’ she said, with one of those flashes of shrewd observation which sometimes come to inconsequent people, and make it difficult for those around them to be sure how much they see and how much passes unobserved.

‘It was not Jem, it was this other man.’

‘Which other man?’ Mrs. Agar gave a little gasp, as if she had found something she feared to find.

‘The man who told me—he was Jem’s superior officer.’

‘When did he tell you—where?’

‘He came to see me at Cambridge, and brought those things of Jem’s,’ replied Arthur. So far from feeling guilty at thus revealing all that he had promised to keep secret, he was now beginning to experience some pangs of conscience at the recollection of a concealment which, by a supreme effort, had been made to extend to four months.

There was a sly gleam in Mrs. Agar’s eyes. A close observer knowing her well could have seen the cunning written on her face, for it was cheap and obvious.

‘Oh!’ she said indifferently, ‘and what sort of man was he?’

Arthur pondered with a deliberation that almost maddened her.

‘Oh!’ he replied at length, ‘a small man, dark, with a sunburnt face; a Jew, I should think. He was rather well dressed—in the military style, of course.’

‘Yes,’ muttered Mrs. Agar. ‘Yes.’

There was a long silence, during which Mrs. Agar reflected, as deeply, perhaps, as she had ever reflected in her life.

Then she discovered something for herself which had of necessity been pointed out to her son—a subtle divergence of character.

‘But,’ she said, ‘of course Jem may never come back from this expedition. It *must* be very dangerous.’

‘It is very dangerous.’

Mrs. Agar's sigh of relief was quite audible. It is thus that nature sometimes betrays human nature.

‘Did *he* say that? Did *he* think that of it?’

Seymour Michael's opinion still had value in her eyes.

‘Yes,’ the reply came slowly; ‘he said that we might almost look upon Jem as a dead man.’

Mother and son looked at each other and said nothing. Heredity is a strange thing, and one alternately aggrandised and slighted. Blood is a very powerful force, but the little injections made in childhood's years bear a wondrous crop of good or evil fruit in later days.

Left alone, Arthur Agar's natural tendency was towards good. Probably because he was timid, and goodness seems the safer

course. There are many who have not the courage to forsake goodness, even for a moment. But under the influence of a stronger will—that is to say, under the influence of four out of every five persons crossing his path—Arthur was liable to be led in any direction. He would rather have sinned in company than have cultivated virtue in the solitude usually accorded to that state.

Somehow, in his mother's presence it did not seem so very wrong to keep back the truth respecting Jem and to turn it to his own ends. It did not seem either mean or cowardly to take advantage of a rival's absence and gain his object by deception. So, perhaps, it was in the beginning, when the world was young. In those days also a mother and son helped each other in decep-

tion, and so since then have many thousands of mothers (incompetent or vicious) led their children to ruin.

‘Of course,’ said Mrs. Agar, ‘if Jem goes and does things of that description he must take the consequences.’

Arthur said nothing in reply to this. The thought had been his for some months, but he had never put it into shape.

‘We are perfectly justified,’ she went on, ‘in acting as if Jem were dead until he deigns to advise us to the contrary.’

This also was putting a long-cherished thought into form.

Arthur knew that he ought to have told his mother then and there that Jem had taken every step in his power to advise him as soon as possible of the falseness of the news transmitted to the newspapers. But

something held him silent, some taint of hereditary untruthfulness.

‘I do not see,’ she said, ‘that this news can, therefore, make much difference. There is no reason to alter any of our plans. To begin with, I am certain that he is dead. We must have heard by this time if he had been living.’

Arthur gave a little nod of acquiescence.

‘And also,’ pursued Mrs. Agar with characteristic inconsistency, ‘he evidently does not care about us or our feelings.’

Arthur knew what she meant, and he descended as low in the moral scale as ever he went during his life.

‘But,’ he said, ‘there is, all the same, no time to lose.’

He passed his hand over his sleek, lifeless hair with a weary look.

‘Well, dear,’ said his mother soothingly, ‘I will see Ellen Glynde to-morrow, and try to make her say something to Dora. A girl’s mother has always more influence than her father.’

This idiotic axiom seemed to satisfy Arthur, probably because he knew no better, and he rose to take his bedroom candlestick.

Mrs. Agar was a person utterly incapable of harbouring two thoughts at the same moment. She never even got so far as to place two sides of a question upon an equal footing in her mind. All her questions had but one side. She was not thinking of Arthur when she went to her room. She was not thinking of him when she lay staring at the daylight, which had crept up into the sky before she closed her eyes.

She tossed and turned and moaned aloud with a childish impatience. Her mind could find no rest; it could not throw off the deadly knowledge that Seymour Michael had come back into her life. And somehow she was no longer Anna Agar, but Anna Hethbridge. She was no longer the fond mother whose whole world was filled by thoughts of her son—a miserable, thoughtless, haphazard world it was—but again she was the wronged woman, moved by the one great passion that had stirred her sordid soul, a fearsome hatred for Seymour Michael.

She was not an analytical woman; she had never thought about her own thoughts; she was as superficial as human nature can well be. That is to say, she was little more than an animal with the gift of speech, added to one or two small items of knowledge

which divide men from beasts. But she *knew* that this was not the end. She never doubted for a moment that it was merely a beginning, that Seymour Michael was coming back into her life.

Like a child she tossed and tumbled in her bed, muttering half-consciously, 'Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?'

CHAPTER XXIII

AND THE TIME PASSES SOMEHOW

His hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him.

FOR two days Mrs. Glynde had been going about the world with a bright red patch on either cheek ; and it would seem that on the third day, namely, the Sunday, things came to a crisis in her disturbed mind. At morning service her fervour was something astonishing—the quaver in her voice was more noticeable in the hymns than ever, and the space devoted to silent prayer after the blessing was so abnormally long that Stark, the sexton, had to rattle the keys twice, with all due respect

and for the sake of his Sunday dinner, before she rose from her knees; whereas once usually sufficed.

It was the devout practice that all the Rectory servants should go to evening service, while Mrs. Glynde, or Dora, or both, remained at home to take care of the house. On this particular evening Mrs. Glynde proposed that Dora should stay with her, and what her mother proposed Dora usually acceded to.

‘Dear,’ said the elder lady, with a nervous little jerk of the head which was habitual or physical, ‘I have heard about Arthur.’

They were sitting in the drawing-room, with windows open to the ground, and the fading light was insufficient to read by, although both had books.

‘Yes, mother,’ answered the girl in rather a tired voice, quite forgetting to be cheerful.

‘I should like to know exactly what you heard.’

‘Well, Anna told me,’ and there was a whole world of distrust in the little phrase, ‘that Arthur had asked you to be his wife, and that you had refused without giving a reason.’

‘I gave him a reason,’ replied Dora; ‘the best one. I said that I did not love him.’

There was a little pause. The two women looked out on to the quiet lawn. They seemed singularly anxious to avoid looking at each other.

‘But that might come, dear. I think it would come.’

‘I know it would not,’ replied Dora quietly. There was a dreaminess in her

voice, as if she were repeating something she had heard or said before.

Suddenly Mrs. Glynde rose from her chair, and, going towards her daughter, she knelt on the soft carpet, still afraid to look at her face. There was something suggestive and strange in the attitude, for the elder woman was crouching at the feet of the younger.

‘My darling,’ she whispered, ‘I know, I *know*! I have known all along. But mind, no one else knows, no one suspects! *It* can never come to you again in this life. Women are like that, it never comes to them twice. To some it never comes at all; think of that, dear, it never comes to them at all! Surely that is worse?’

Dora took the nervous, eager hands in her own quiet grasp and held them still. But she said nothing.

‘ I have prayed night and morning,’ the elder woman went on in the same pleading whisper, ‘ that strength might be given you, and I think my prayers were heard. For you have been strong, and no one has known except me, and I do not matter. The strength must have come from somewhere. I like to think that I had something to do with it, however little.’

Again there was a silence. Across the quiet garden, from the church that was hidden among the trees, the sound of the evening hymn came rising and falling, the harshness of the rustic voices toned down by the whispering of the leaves.

‘ I know,’ Mrs. Glynde went on, speaking perhaps out of her own experience, ‘ that now it must seem that there is nothing left. I know that It can never come to you, but

something else may—a sort of alleviation ; something that is a little stronger than resignation, and many people think that it is love. It is not love ; never believe that ! But it is surely sent because so many women have—to go through life—without that—which makes life worth living.’

‘ Hush, dear ! ’ said Dora ; and Mrs. Glynde paused as if to collect herself. Perhaps her daughter stopped her just in time.

‘ There is,’ she went on in a calmer voice, ‘ a sort of satisfaction in the duties that come and have to be performed. The duties towards one’s husband and the others—the others, darling—are the best. They are not the same, not the same as if—as they might have been, but sometimes it is a great alleviation. And the time passes somehow.’

It is not the clever people who make all

the epigrams ; but sometimes those who merely live and feel, and are perhaps objects of ridicule. Mrs. Glynde was one of these. She had unwittingly made an epigram. She had summed up life in five words, ' And the time passes somehow.'

' And, dear,' she went on, ' it is not wise, perhaps it is not quite right, to turn one's back upon an alleviation which is offered. Arthur would be very kind to you. He is really fond of you, and perhaps the very fact of his not being clever or brilliant or anything like that might be a blessing in the future, for he would not expect so much.'

' He would have to expect nothing,' said Dora, speaking for the first time, ' because I could give him nothing.'

She spoke in rather an indifferent voice, and in the gloom her mother could not see

her face. It was a singular thing that neither of them seemed to take Arthur Agar's feelings into account in the very smallest degree; and this must be accounted to them for wisdom.

Dora was, as her mother had said, very strong. She never gave way. Her delicate lips never quivered, but she took care to keep them close pressed. Only in her eyes was the pain to be seen, and perhaps that was why her mother did not dare to look.

'There is no hurry,' she pleaded. 'You need not decide now.'

'But,' answered Dora, 'I have decided now, and he knows my decision.'

'Perhaps after some time—some years?' suggested Mrs. Glynde.

'A great many years,' put in Dora.

'If he asks you again—oh! I know it

would be better, dear ; better for you in every way. I do not say that you would be quite happy. But it would be a sort of happiness ; there would be less unhappiness, because you would have less time to think. I do not say anything about the position and the wealth and such considerations, for they are not of much importance to a good woman.'

'After a great many years,' said Dora, in that calm and judicial voice which fell like ice on her mother's heart, 'I will see—if he chooses to wait.'

'Yes, but——' began Mrs. Glynde, but she did not go on. That which she was about to say would scarcely have been appropriate. But so far as the facts were concerned she might just as well have said it. For Dora knew as well as she did that Arthur Agar

would not wait. Women are not blind to manifest facts. They know us, my brothers, better than we think. And they are not quite so romantic as we take them to be. Their love is a better thing than ours, because it is more practical and more defined. They do not seek an ideal of their own imagination; but when something approaching to it crosses their path in the flesh they know what they want, and they do not change.

Before the silence was again broken the murmur of voices told them that the church doors had been opened, and presently they discerned a female form crossing the lawn towards the open window. It was 'Sister' Cecilia, walking with that mincing lightness of tread which seems to be the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual superiority over the remainder of womankind.

Good women—those mistaken females who move in an atmosphere of ostentatious good works—usually walk like this. Like this they enter the humble cot with a little soup and a lot of advice. Like this they smilingly step, where angels would fear to tread, upon feelings which they are incapable of understanding.

Mrs. Glynde got quietly up and left the room. As the door closed behind her, ‘Sister’ Cecilia’s gently persuasive voice was heard.

‘Dora! Dora dear!’

‘Yes,’ replied the girl without any enthusiasm, rising and going to the window.

‘Will you walk with me a little way across the fields? It is such a lovely evening.’

‘Yes, if you like.’

And Dora passed out of the open window.

‘I am sorry,’ said ‘Sister’ Cecilia after a few paces, ‘that you were not in church. We had such a bright service.’

Dora, like some more of us, wondered vaguely where the adjective applied, especially on a gloomy evening without candles, but she said nothing.

‘I stayed at home with mother,’ she explained practically. ‘The servants were all out.’

‘Sister’ Cecilia was not listening. She was gazing up at the sky, where a few stars were beginning to show themselves.

‘One feels,’ she murmured with a sigh, ‘on such an evening as this, that, after all, nothing matters much.’

‘About the servants do you mean? They are going on better now.’

‘No, dear, about life. I mean that at

times one feels that this cannot be the end of it all.'

'Well, we ought to feel that, I suppose, being Christians.'

'And some day we shall see the meaning of all our troubles,' pursued 'Sister' Cecilia. 'It is so hard for us older ones, who have passed through it, to stand by helpless, only guessing at the pain and anguish of it all, whereas, perhaps, we could help if we only knew. A little more candour, a little more confidence might so easily lead to mutual help and consolation.'

'Possibly,' admitted Dora without any encouragement.

'I am so sorry for poor Arthur,' whispered 'Sister' Cecilia, apparently to the evening shades.

Dora was silent. She knew how to treat 'Sister' Cecilia. Jem had taught her that.

'It has been such a terrible blow. His letters to his mother are quite heartbroken.'

Dora reserved her opinion of grown-up men who write heartbroken letters to their mothers.

'I know all about it,' 'Sister' Cecilia went on, quite regardless of the truth, as some good people are. 'Dora, dear, I know all about it.'

Silence, a silence which reminded 'Sister' Cecilia of a sense of discomfiture which had more than once been hers in conversation with Jem.

'Have you nothing to tell me, dear?' she inquired. 'Nothing to say to me.'

'Nothing,' replied Dora pleasantly. 'Especially as you know all about it.'

‘Will you never change your mind?’
persuasively.

‘No, I am not the sort of person to
change my mind.’

There was a little pause, and again ‘Sister’
Cecilia whispered to the evening shades.

‘I cannot help hoping that some day it
may be different. It is not as if there
were anyone else——?’

Silence again.

‘I dare say,’ added ‘Sister’ Cecilia, after
waiting in vain for an answer to her implied
question, ‘that I am wrong, but I cannot
help being in favour of a little more candour,
a little mutual confidence.’

‘I cannot help feeling,’ replied Dora
quietly, ‘that we are all best employed when
we mind our own business.’

‘Yes, dear, I know. But it is very hard

to stand idly by and see young people make mistakes which can only bring them sorrow. I want to tell you to think very deeply before you elect to lead the life of a single woman. It is a life full of temptation to idleness and self-indulgence. There are many single women who, I am really afraid, are quite useless in the world. They only gossip and pry into their neighbours' affairs and make mischief. It is because they have nothing to do. I have known several women like that, and I cannot help thinking that they would have been happier if they had married. Perhaps they did not have the chance. One does not understand these things.'

'Sister' Cecilia cast her eyes upwards toward the tree-tops to see if perchance the explanation was written there.

‘Of course,’ she went on complacently, drawing down her bonnet-strings, ‘there are many useful lives of single women. Lives which the world would sadly miss should it please God to take them. Women who live, not for themselves, but for others ; who go about the world helping their neighbours with advice and the fruits of their own experience ; ever the first to go to the afflicted and to those who are in trouble. They do not receive their reward here, they are not always thanked. The ignorant are sometimes even rude. They have only the knowledge that they are doing good.’

‘That *must* be a satisfaction,’ murmured Dora fervently.

‘It is, dear ; it is. But—you will excuse me, Dora dear, if I say this ?—I do not think you are that sort of woman.’

‘No,’ answered Dora, ‘I don’t think I am.’

‘And that is why I have said this to you. Now, don’t answer me, dear. Just think about it quietly. I think I have done my duty in telling you what was on my mind. It is always best, although it is sometimes difficult, or even painful; but then, it is one’s duty. Kiss me, dear! Good-night!—*good-night!*’

And so ‘Sister’ Cecilia left Dora—mincing away into the gloom of the overhanging trees. And so she leaves these pages. Verily the good have their reward here below in a coat of self-complacency which is as impervious to the buffets of life as to the sarcasm of the worldly.

CHAPTER XXIV

A STAB IN THE DARK

Slander, meanest spawn of Hell ;
And women's slander is the worst.

MRS. AGAR was a person incapable of awaiting that vague result called the development of things.

Arthur had never been forced to wait for anything in his life. No longer at least than tradespeople required, and in many cases not so long, for Mrs. Agar had an annoying way of refusing to listen to reason. She never allowed that laws applying to ordinary people, served more or less faithfully by tailor or dressmaker, applied to herself or to Arthur.

And tradespeople, one finds, are not always of the same mind as the Medes and Persians—they square matters quietly in the bill. They had to do it very quietly indeed with Mrs. Agar, who endeavoured strenuously to get the best value for her money all through life ; a remnant of Jaggery House, Clapham Common, which the placid wealth of Stagholme never obliterated.

After the luncheon, specially prepared and laid before the Rector, this second Rebecca awaited the result impatiently. But nothing came of it. Although Mrs. Agar now looked upon Dora as the latest whim of the not-to-be-denied Arthur, she could hardly consider Mr. Glynde in the light of a tradesman retailing the said commodity, and, therefore, to be bullied and harassed into making haste. She reflected with misgiving that Mr. Glynde

was an exponent of the tiresome art of talking over and thinking out matters which required neither words nor thought, and saw no prospect of an immediate furtherance of her design.

With a mistaken and much practised desire of striking when the iron was hot, Mrs. Agar, like many a wiser person, began, therefore, to bang about in all directions, hitting not only the iron but the anvil, her own knuckles and the susceptibilities of anyone standing in the neighbourhood. She could not leave things to Mr. Glynde, but must needs see Dora herself. She had in her mind the nucleus of a simple if scurrilous scheme which will show itself hereafter. Her opportunity presented itself a few days later.

A neighbouring family counting itself county, presumably on the strength of never

being able to absent themselves from the favoured neighbourhood on account of monetary incapacity, gave its annual garden-party at this time. To this entertainment the whole countryside was in the habit of repairing—not with an idea of enjoying itself, but because everybody did it. To be bidden to this garden-party was in itself a *cachet* of respectability. This indeed was the only satisfaction to be gathered from the festivity. If the honour was great, the hospitality was small. If the condescension was vast, the fare provided was verging on the stingy. Here were served by half-starved domestic servants, in the smallest of tumblers, ‘cups’ wherein were mixed liquors, such as cider, usually consumed by self-respecting persons in the undiluted condition and in mugs. Upon cucumber-cup, taken in county society, as on

a dinner of herbs, one hardly expects the guest to grow convivial. Therefore at this garden-party those bidden to the feast were in the habit of wandering sadly through the shrubbery, seeking whom they might avoid, and in the course of such a perambulation, with a young man conversant of himself, Dora met Mrs. Agar. Even the mistress of Stagholme was preferable to the young man from London, and besides—there were associations. So Dora drew Mrs. Agar into her promenade, and presently the young man got his *congé*.

At first they talked of local topics, and Mrs. Agar, who had a fine sense of hospitality, said her say about the cider cup. Then she gave an awkward little laugh, and with an assumption of lightness which did not succeed she said :

‘I hope, dear, you do not intend to keep my poor boy in suspense much longer?’

‘Do you mean Arthur?’ asked Dora.

‘Yes, dear. I really don’t see why there should be this absurd reserve between us.’

‘I am quite willing,’ replied the girl, ‘to hear what you have to say about it.’

‘Yes, but not to talk of it.’

‘Well, I suppose Arthur has told you all there is to tell. If there is anything more that you want to know I shall be very glad to tell you.’

‘Well, of course, I don’t understand it at all,’ burst out Mrs. Agar eagerly. This was quite true; neither she nor Arthur could understand how anyone could refuse such a glorious offer as he had made.

‘Perhaps I can explain. Arthur asked

me to marry him. I quite appreciated the honour, but I declined it.'

'Yes, but why? Surely you didn't mean it?'

'I did mean it.'

'Well,' exclaimed Mrs. Agar with a little toss of the head, 'I am sure I cannot see what more you want. There are many girls who would be glad to be mistress of Stagholme.'

And it must be remembered that she said this knowing quite well that Jem was probably alive. There are some crimes which women commit daily in the family circle which deserve a greater punishment than that meted out to a legal criminal.

'That is precisely what I ventured to point out to Arthur,' said Dora, unconsciously borrowing her father's ironical neatness of enunciation.

‘ But why shouldn’t you take the opportunity ? There are not many estates like it in England. Your position would be as good as that of a titled lady, and I am sure you could not want a better husband.’

‘ I like Arthur as a friend, but I could never marry him, so it is useless to discuss the question.’

‘ But why ? ’ persisted Mrs. Agar.

‘ Because I do not care for him in the right way.’

‘ But that would come,’ said Mrs. Agar. It was only natural that she should use an argument which is accountable for more misery on earth than mothers dream of.

‘ No, it would never come.’

Mrs. Agar gave a cunning little laugh, and paused so as to lend additional weight to her next remark.

‘That is a dangerous thing for a girl to say.’

‘Is it?’ inquired Dora indifferently.

‘Yes, because they can never be sure, unless——’

‘Unless what? I am quite sure.’

‘Unless there is someone else,’ said Mrs. Agar, with an exaggerated significance suggestive of the servants’ hall.

Dora did not answer at once. They walked on for a few moments in silence, passing other guests walking in couples. Then Dora replied with a succinctness acquired from her father :

‘Generalities about women,’ she said, ‘are always a mistake. Indeed, all generalities are dangerous. But if you and Arthur care to apply this to me, you are at liberty to do so. Whatever generalities you apply and

whatever you say will make no difference to the main question. Moreover, you will, perhaps, be acting a kinder part if you give Arthur to understand once for all that my decision is final.'

'As you like, dear, as you like,' muttered Mrs. Agar, apparently abandoning the argument, whereas in reality she had not yet begun it.

'How do you do, dear Mrs. Martin?' she went on in the same breath, bowing and smiling to a lady who passed them at that moment.

'Of course,' she said, returning in a final way to the question after a few moments' silence, 'of course I do not believe all I hear; in fact, I contradict a good deal. But I have been told that gossips talked about you a good deal last year, at the time of Jem's

death. I think it only fair that you should know.'

'Thank you,' said Dora curtly.

'Of course, dear, *I* didn't believe anything about it.'

'Thank you,' said Dora again.

'I should have been sorry to do so.'

Then Dora turned upon her suddenly.

'What do you mean, Aunt Anna?' she asked with determination.

'Oh, nothing, dear, nothing. Don't get flurried about it.'

'I am not at all flurried,' replied Dora quietly. 'You said that you would be sorry to have to believe what gossips said of me last year at the time of Jem's death——'

'No, Dora,' interrupted Mrs. Agar, 'I never said anything against you in any way; how can you say such a thing?'

‘And,’ continued Dora, with an unpleasant calmness of manner, ‘I must ask you to explain. What did the gossips say, and why should you be sorry to have to believe it?’

Mrs. Agar’s reluctance was not quite genuine, nor was it well enough simulated to deceive Dora.

‘Well, dear,’ she said, ‘if you insist, they said that there had been something between you and Jem—long, long ago, of course, before he went out to India.’

Dora shrugged her shoulders.

‘They are welcome to say what they like.’

Mrs. Agar was silent, awaiting a second question.

‘And why should you be sorry to believe that?’ inquired the girl.

‘I—I hardly like to tell you,’ said Mrs. Agar, in a low voice.

Dora waited in silence, without appearing to heed Mrs. Agar's reluctance.

'I am afraid, dear,' went on the elder lady when she saw that there was no chance of assistance, 'that we have been all sadly mistaken in Jem. He was not—all that we thought him.'

'In what way?' asked Dora. She had turned quite white, and her lips were suddenly dry and parched. She held her parasol a little lower, so that Mrs. Agar could not see her face. She was sure enough of her voice. She had had practice in that.

'In what way was Jem not all that we thought him?' she repeated evenly, like a lesson learnt by heart.

Mrs. Agar stammered. She tried to blush, but she could not manage that.

'I cannot very well give you details.'

Perhaps, when you are older. You know, dear, in India people are not very particular. They have peculiar ideas, I mean, of morals—different from ours. And perhaps he saw no harm in it.'

'In what?' inquired Dora gravely.

'Well, in the life they lead out there. It appears that there was some unfortunate attachment. I think she was married, or something like that.'

'Who told you this?' asked Dora in a voice like a threat.

'A man told Arthur at Cambridge—one of poor Jem's fellow-officers. The man who brought home the Diary and things.'

Having once begun, Mrs. Agar found herself obliged to go on. She had not time to pause and reflect that she was now staking everything upon the possibility of Jem's

death subsequent to the disaster in which he was supposed to have perished.

Dora did not believe one word of this story, although she was quite without proof to the contrary. Jem's letters had not been frequent, nor had they been remarkable for minuteness of detail respecting his own life. Mrs. Agar had done her best to put a stop to this correspondence altogether, and had succeeded in bringing about a subtle reserve on both sides. She had persistently told Jem that Dora was evidently attached to Arthur, and that their marriage was only the question of a few years. Of this Jem had never found any confirmatory hint in Dora's letters, and from some mistaken sense of chivalry refrained from writing to ask her point blank if it were true.

‘And why,’ said Dora, ‘do you tell me

this? In case what the gossips said might be true?’

‘Ye-es, dear, perhaps it was that.’

‘So as to save me from cherishing any mistaken memory?’

‘Yes, it may have been that.’

And Mrs. Agar was surprised to see Dora turn her back upon her as if she had been something loathsome to look upon, and walk away.

CHAPTER XXV

FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

When the heart speaks, Glory itself is an illusion.

THE 'Mahanaddy' had just turned her blunt prow out westward from the harbour of Port Said, sniffing her native north wind, with a gentle rising movement to that old Mediterranean eastward-tending swell. The lights of the most iniquitous town on earth were fading away in the mist of the desert on the left hand, and on the right the gloom of the sea merged into a grey sky.

The dinner-hour had passed, and the passengers were lolling about on the long

quarter-deck, talking lazily after the manner of men and women who have little to say and much time wherein to say it. It was quite easy to perceive that they had left a voyage of many days behind them, for the funny man had exhausted himself and the politicians were asleep. The lifeless, homeward-bound flirtations had waned long ago, and no one looked twice at anyone else. They all knew each other's dresses and vices and little aggravating habits, and only three or four of them were aware that human nature runs deeper than such superficial details.

Away forward, behind the sheep-pens, an Italian gentleman in the ice industry was scraping on a yellow fiddle which looked sticky. But like many things of plain exterior this unprepossessing instrument had

something in it, something that the Italian gentleman knew how to extract, and all the ship was hushed into listening. Such as had conversation left spoke in low tones, and even the stewards in the pantry ceased for a time to test the strength of the dinner-plates.

On a small clear space of deck between the door of the doctor's cabin and the saloon gangway two men were walking slowly backwards and forwards. They were both tall men, both large, and consequently both inclined to taciturnity. They had said, perhaps, as little as any two persons on board, which may have accounted for the fact that they were talking now, and still seemed to have plenty to say.

One was dark and clean-shaven, with something of the sea in his mien and gait.

His nose and chin were singularly clean cut, and suggestive of an ancestral type. This was the ship's doctor, a man who probed men's hearts as well as their bodies, and wrote of what he found there. His companion was an antitype—a representative of the fair race found in England by the ancestors of the other when they came and conquered. He wore a beard, and his face was burnt to the colour of mahogany, which had a strange effect in contrast to the bluest of Saxon eyes.

The Doctor was talking.

‘Then,’ he was saying, ‘who the devil are you?’

The other smiled, a gentle, triumphant smile. The smile of a man who, humbly recognising himself at a just estimation, is

conscious of having outwitted another, cleverer than himself.

‘You finish your pipe,’ he said, and he walked away with long firm strides towards the saloon stairs. The Doctor went to the rail, where, resting his arms on the solid teak, he leant, gazing thoughtfully out over the sea, which was part of his life. For he knew the great waters, and loved them with all the quiet strength of a slow-tongued man.

Before very long someone came behind and touched him on the shoulder. He turned, and in the fading light looked into the smiling face of his late companion—the same and yet quite different, for the beard was gone, and there only remained the long fair moustache.

‘Yes,’ said Dr. Mark Ruthine, ‘Jem

Agar. I was a fool not to know you at first.'

A sort of shyness flickered for a moment in the blue eyes.

'I have been practising so hard during the last ten months to look like someone else that I hardly feel like myself,' he said.

'Um-m! There was something uncanny about you when you first came on board. I used to watch you at meals, and wonder what it was. By God, Agar, I *am* glad!'

'Thanks,' replied Jem Agar. He was looking round him rather nervously. 'You don't think there is anybody on board who will know me, do you?'

'No one, barring the Captain.'

'Oh,' said Agar calmly, 'he is all right. He can keep his mouth shut.'

‘There is no doubt about that,’ replied the Doctor.

A little pause followed, during which they both listened involuntarily to the ice-cream merchant’s musical voice, which was now floating over the silent decks, raised in song.

‘I should like to hear all about it some day,’ said the ship’s surgeon at last. He knew his man, and no detail of the strange lives that passed the horizon of his daily existence was ever forgotten. Only he usually found that those who had the most to tell required a little assistance in their narration.

‘It is rather a rum business,’ answered Jem Agar, not displeased.

At this moment the ship’s bell rang four clear notes into the night.

‘Ten o’clock,’ said the Doctor. ‘Come into my cabin and have a smoke ; the Captain

will be in soon. He would like to hear the story too.'

So they passed into the cabin, and before they had been there many minutes the Captain joined them. For a moment he stood in the doorway, then he came forward with outstretched hand.

'Well,' he said, 'all that I can say is that you ought to be dead. But it's not my business.

He had seen too many freaks of fortune to be surprised at this.

'I thought,' he continued, 'that there was something familiar about the back of your head. Back of a man's head never changes. It's a funny thing.'

He sat down in his usual chair, and looked with a cheery smile upon him who had risen from the death column of the 'Times.' Then he turned to his pipe.

‘You know, Agar,’ he said, ‘I was beastly sorry about that—death of yours. Cut me up wonderfully for a few minutes. That is saying a lot in these days.’

Agar laughed.

‘It is very kind of you to say so,’ he said rather awkwardly.

‘And I,’ added Dr. Ruthine from behind the whisky and soda tray, in the deliberate voice of a man who is saying something with an effort, ‘felt that it was a pity. That is how it struck me—a pity.’

Then, very disjointedly, and in a manner which could scarcely be set down here, Major James Agar told his singular story. There are—thank heaven!—many such stories still untold; there are, one would be inclined to hope, many such still uncommenced. As a nation we may be on the

decline, but there is something to go on with in us yet.

Once when the narrator paused, Dr. Ruthine went to the side table and opened some bottles.

‘Whisky?’ he inquired with curt hospitality, ‘or anything else your fancy may paint, down to tea.’

Agar rose to pour out his own allowance, and for a moment the two men stood together. With the critical eye of a soldier, which seems to weigh flesh and blood, he looked his host for the time being up and down.

‘They don’t make men like you and me on tea,’ he said, reaching out his hand towards a tumbler.

Then the story went on. At first the ship’s doctor listened to it with interest but

without absorption, then suddenly something seemed to catch his attention and hold it riveted. When a pause came he leant forward, pointing an emphasising finger.

‘When you spoke just now of the chief,’ he said, ‘did you mean Michael?’

‘Yes.’

‘What! Seymour Michael?’

‘Yes.’

The Captain tapped his pipe against his boot and leant back with a shrug of the shoulders awaiting further developments.

‘And you mean to tell me that you put yourself entirely in the hands of Seymour Michael?’ pursued the Doctor.

‘Yes, why not?’

Mark Ruthine shook his head with a little laugh.

‘I always thought, Agar, that you were a bit of a fool!’

‘I have sometimes suspected it myself,’ admitted the soldier meekly.

‘Why, man,’ said Ruthine, ‘Seymour Michael is one of the biggest rascals on God’s earth. I would not trust him with fourpence round the corner.’

‘Nor would I,’ put in the Captain, ‘and the sum is not excessive.’

Jem Agar was sipping his whisky and soda with the placidity of a giant who fears no open fight and never thinks of foul play.

‘I don’t see,’ he muttered, ‘what harm he can do me.’

‘No more do I, at the moment,’ replied the Doctor; ‘but the man is a liar and an unscrupulous cad. I have kept an eye on him

for years because he interests me. He has never run a straight course since he came into the field; he has consistently sacrificed truth, honour, and his best friend to his own ambition ever since the beginning.'

Jem Agar smiled at the Doctor's vehemence, although he was aware that such a display was far from being characteristic of the man.

'Of course,' he admitted, 'in the matter of honour and glory I expect to be swindled. But I don't care. I know the chap's reputation, and all that, but he can hardly get rid of the fact that I have done the thing and he has not.'

'I was not thinking so much of that,' replied the other. 'Men sell their souls for honour and glory and never get paid.'

He paused; then, with the sure touch of

one who has dabbled with pen and ink in the humanities, he laid his finger on the vulnerable spot.

‘I was thinking more,’ he said, ‘of what you had trusted him to do—telling certain persons, I mean, that you were not dead. He is just as likely as not to have suppressed the information.’

Jem Agar was looking very grave, with a sudden pinched appearance about the lips which was only half concealed by his moustache.

‘Why should he do that?’ he asked sharply.

‘He would do it if it suited his purpose. He is not the man to take into consideration such things as feelings—especially the feelings of others.’

‘You’re a bit hard on him, Ruthine,’ said

Jem doubtfully. 'Why should it suit his convenience?'

'Secrecy was essential for your purpose and his; in telling a secret one doubles the risks of its disclosure each time a new confidant is admitted. Besides, the man's nature is quite extraordinarily secretive. He has Jewish and Scotch blood in his veins, and the result is that he would rather disseminate false news than true on the off chance of benefiting thereby later on. For men of that breed each piece of accurate information, however trivial, has a marketable value, and they don't part with it unless they get their price.'

There followed a silence, during which Jem Agar went back in mental retrospection to the only interview he had ever had with Seymour Michael, and the old

lurking sense of distrust awoke within his heart.

‘But,’ said the Captain, who was an optimist—he even applied that theory to human nature—‘I suppose it is all right now. Everybody knows now that you are among the quick—eh?’

‘No,’ replied Jem, ‘only Michael ; it was arranged that I should telegraph to him.’

‘Of course,’ the Doctor hastened to say, for he had perceived a change in Agar’s demeanour, ‘all this is the purest supposition. It is only a theory built upon the man’s character. It is wonderful how consistent people are. Judge how a man would act, and you will find that he has acted like it afterwards.’

As if in illustration of the theory Jem Agar looked gravely determined, but uttered no threat directed towards Seymour

Michael. His quiet face was a threat in itself.

‘Well,’ he said, rising, ‘I am keeping you fellows from your slumbers. I am still sleeping on deck ; can’t get accustomed to the atmosphere below decks after six months’ sleeping in the open.’

He nodded and left them.

‘Rum chap!’ muttered the Captain, looking at his watch when the footsteps had died away over the silent decks.

‘One of the queerest specimens I know,’ retorted Dr. Mark Ruthine, who was fingering a pen and looking longingly towards the inkstand. The Captain—a man of renowned discretion—quietly departed.

There is no more distrustful man than the simple gentleman of honour who finds himself deceived and tricked. It is as if the bottom

suddenly fell out of his trust in all mankind, and there is nothing left but a mocking void. Jem Agar lay on his mattress beneath the awning, and stared hard at a bright star near the horizon. He was realising that life is, after all, a sorry thing of chance, and that all his world might be hanging at that moment on the word of an untrustworthy man.

Before morning he had determined to telegraph from Malta to Seymour Michael to meet him at Plymouth on the arrival of the 'Mahanaddy' at that port.

CHAPTER XXVI

BALANCING ACCOUNTS

And yet God has not said a word.

ONE fine morning in June the 'Mahanaddy' steamed with stately deliberation into the calm water inside Plymouth breakwater. Many writers love to dwell with pathetic insistence on incidents of a departure; but there is also pathos—perhaps deeper and truer because more subtle—in the arrival of the homeward-bound ship.

Who can tell? There may have been others as anxious to look on the green slopes of Mount Edgcumbe as the man with the

mahogany-coloured face who stood ever smoking—smoking—always at the forward starboard corner of the hurricane deck. His story had not leaked out, because only two men on board knew it—men with no conversational leaks whatever. He had made no other friends. But many watched him half-interestedly, and perhaps a few divined the great calm impatience beneath the suppressed quiet of his manner.

‘That man—Jem Agar—is dangerous,’ the Doctor had said to the Captain more than once, and Mark Ruthine was not often egregiously mistaken in such matters.

‘Um!’ replied the captain of the ‘Mahannaddy.’ ‘There is an uncanny calm.’

They were talking about him now as the Captain—his own pilot for Plymouth and the Channel—walked slowly backwards and

forwards on the bridge. It seemed quite natural for the Doctor to be sitting on the rail by the engine-room telegraph. The passengers and the men were quite accustomed to it. This friendship was a matter of history to the homeless world of men and women who travelled east and west through the Suez Canal.

‘He has asked me,’ the Doctor was saying, ‘to go ashore with him at Plymouth ; I don’t know why. I imagine he is a little bit afraid of wringing Seymour Michael’s neck.’

‘Just as likely as not,’ observed the Captain. ‘It would be a good thing done, but don’t let Agar do it.’

‘May I leave the ship at Plymouth?’ asked Mark Ruthine, with a quiet air of obedience which seemed to be accepted with the gravity with which it was offered.

‘ I don’t see why you should not,’ was the reply. ‘ Everybody goes ashore there except about half a dozen men, who certainly will not want your services.’

‘ I should rather like to do it. We come from the same part of the country, and Agar seems anxious to have me. He is not a chap to say much, but I imagine there will be some sort of a *dénouement*.’

The Captain was looking through a pair of glasses ahead, towards the anchorage.

‘ All right,’ he said. ‘ Go.’

And he continued to attend to his business with that watchful care which made the ‘ Mahanaddy ’ one of the safest boats afloat.

Presently Mark Ruthine left the bridge and went to his cabin to pack. As he descended he paused, and retracing his steps forward he went and touched Jem Agar on the arm.

'It's all right,' he said. 'I'll go with you.'

Agar nodded. He was gazing at the green English hills and far faint valley of the Tamar with a curious gleam of excitement in his eyes.

Half an hour later they landed.

'You stick by me,' said Jem Agar, when they discerned the small wiry form of Seymour Michael awaiting them on the quay. 'I want you to hear everything.'

This man was, as Ruthine had said, dangerous. He was too calm. There was something grand and terrifying in that white heat which burned in his eyes and drove the blood from his lips.

Seymour Michael came forward with his pleasant smile, waving his hand in greeting to Jem and to Ruthine, whom he knew.

Jem shook hands with him.

‘I’m all right, thanks,’ he said curtly, in answer to Seymour Michael’s inquiry.

‘Good business—good business,’ exclaimed the General, who seemed somewhat unnecessarily excited.

‘Old Mark Ruthine too!’ he went on. ‘You look as fit as ever. Still turning your thousands out of the British public—eh?’

‘Yes,’ said Ruthine, ‘thank you.’

‘Just run ashore for half an hour, I suppose?’ continued Seymour Michael, looking hurriedly out towards the ‘Mahanaddy.’

‘No,’ replied Ruthine, ‘I leave the ship here.’

The small man glanced from the face of one to the other with something sly and uneasy in his eyes.

Jem Agar had altered since he saw him

last in the little tent far up on the slopes of the Pamir. He was older and graver. There was also a wisdom in his eyes—that steadfast wise look that comes to eyes which have looked too often on death. Mark Ruthine he knew, and him he distrusted, with that quiet keenness of observation which was his.

‘Now,’ he said eagerly to Jem, ‘what I thought we might do was to have a little breakfast and catch the eleven o’clock train up to town. If Ruthine will join us I, for one, shall be very pleased. He won’t mind our talking shop.’

Mark Ruthine was attending to the luggage, which was being piled upon a cab.

‘Have you not had breakfast?’ asked Agar.

‘Well, I have had a little, but I don’t

mind a second edition. That waiter chap at the hotel got me out of bed much too soon. However, it is worth getting up the night before to see you back, old chap.'

'Is there not an earlier train than the eleven o'clock?' asked Agar, looking at his watch. There was a singular constraint in his manner which Seymour Michael could not understand.

'Yes, there is one at nine forty-five.'

'Then let us go by that. We can get something at the station if we want it.'

'Make it a bottle of champagne to celebrate the return of the explorer, and I am your man,' said Michael heartily.

'Make it anything you like,' answered Agar, in a gentler voice. He was beginning to come under the influence of Seymour Michael's sweet voice, and of that fascination

which nearly all educated Jews unconsciously exercise.

He turned and beckoned to Mark Ruthine, who presently joined them, after paying the boatmen.

‘The nine forty-five is the train,’ he said to him. ‘We may as well walk up. The streets of Plymouth are not pleasant to drive through.’

So the cab was sent on with the luggage, and the three men turned to the slope that leads up to the Hoe.

There was some sort of constraint over them, and they reached the summit of the ascent without having exchanged a word.

When they stood on the Hoe, where the old Eddystone lighthouse is now erected, Seymour Michael turned and looked out over the bay where the ships lay at anchor.

‘The good old “Mahanaddy,”’ he said, ‘the finest ship I have ever sailed in.’

Neither man answered him, but they turned also and looked, standing one on each side of him.

Then at last Jem Agar spoke, breaking a silence which had been brooding since the ‘Mahanaddy’ came out of the Canal.

‘I want to know,’ he said, ‘exactly how things stand with my people at home.’

He continued to look out over the bay towards the ‘Mahanaddy,’ but Mark Ruthine was looking at Seymour Michael.

‘Yes,’ replied the General, ‘I wanted to talk to you about that. That was really my reason for proposing that we should wait till the second train.’

‘There cannot be much to say,’ said Jem Agar rather coldly

‘Well, I wanted to tell you all about it.’

‘About what?’

There was what the Captain had called an uncanny calm in the voice. General Michael did not answer, and Jem turned slowly towards him.

‘I presume,’ he said, ‘that I am right in taking it for granted that you have carried out your share of the contract?’

‘My dear fellow, it has been perfectly wonderful. The secret has been kept perfectly.’

‘By all concerned?’

‘Eh!—yes.’

Michael was glancing furtively at Mark Ruthine, as the fox glances back over his shoulder, not at the huntsman, but at the hounds.

‘Did you tell them personally, or did you write?’ pursued Jem Agar relentlessly.

‘My dear fellow,’ replied Michael, pulling out his watch, ‘it is a long story, and we must get to the train.’

‘No,’ replied Agar, in the calm voice which raised a sort of ‘fearful joy’ in Ruthine’s soul, ‘we need not be getting to the train yet, and there is no reason for it to be a long story.’

Seymour Michael gave an uneasy little laugh, which met with no response whatever. The two taller men exchanged a glance over his head. Up to that moment Jem Agar had hoped for the best. He had a greater faith in human nature than Mark Ruthine had managed to retain.

‘Have you or have you not told those people whom you swore to me that you

would tell, out there, that night?' asked Jem.

'I told your brother,' answered the General with dogged indifference.

'Only?'

There was an ugly gleam in the blue eyes.

'I didn't tell him not to tell the others.'

'But you suggested it to him,' put in Mark Ruthine, with the knowledge of mankind that was his.

'What has it got to do with you, at any rate?' snapped Seymour Michael.

'Nothing,' replied Ruthine, looking across at Agar.

'You did not tell Dora Glynde?'

General Michael shrugged his shoulders.

'Why?' asked Jem hoarsely. It was singular, that sudden hoarseness, and the

Doctor, whose business such things were, made a note of it.

‘I didn’t dare to do it. Why, man, it was too dangerous to tell a single soul. If it had leaked out you would have been murdered up there as sure as hell. There would have been plenty of men ready to do it for half-a-crown.’

‘That was *my* business,’ answered Jem coolly. ‘You promised, you *swore*, that you would tell Dora Glynde, my step-mother, and my brother Arthur. And you didn’t do it. Why?’

‘I have given you my reasons—it was too dangerous. Besides, what does it matter? It is all over now.’

‘No,’ said Jem, ‘not yet.’

The clock struck nine at that moment; and from the harbour came the sound of the ships’ bells, high and clear, sounding the hour.

The Hoe was quite deserted ; these three men were alone. A silence followed the ringing of the bells, like the silence that precedes a verdict.

Then Jem Agar spoke.

‘I asked Mark Ruthine,’ he said, ‘to come ashore with me, because I had reason to suspect your good faith. I can’t see now why you should have done this, but I suppose that people who are born liars, as Ruthine says you are, prefer lying to telling the truth. You are coming down now with Ruthine and myself to Stagholme. I shall tell the whole story as it happened, and then you will have to explain matters to the two ladies as best you can.’

A sudden unreasoning terror took possession of Seymour Michael. He knew that one of the ladies was Anna Agar, the woman

who hated him almost as much as he deserved. He was afraid of her ; for it is one consolation to the wronged to know that the wronger goes all through his life with a dull, unquenchable fear upon his heart. But this was not sufficient, this could not account for the mighty terror which clutched his soul at that moment, and he knew it. He felt that this was something beyond that—something which could not be reasoned away. It was a physical terror, one of those emotions which seem to attack the body independently of the soul, a terror striking the Man before it reaches the Mind. His limbs trembled ; it was only by an effort that he kept his teeth clenched to prevent them from chattering.

‘ And,’ said Jem ‘ Agar, ‘ if I find that any harm has been done—if anyone has suffered

for this, I will give you the soundest thrashing you have ever had in your life.'

Both his hearers knew now who Dora Glynde was, what she was to him. He neither added to their knowledge nor sought to mislead. He was not, as we have said, *de ceux qui s'expliquent*.

'Come,' he added, and turning he led the way across the Hoe.

Seymour Michael followed quietly. He was cowed by the inward fear which would not be allayed, and the judicial calmness of these two men paralysed him. Once, in the train, he began explaining matters over again.

'We will hear all that at Stagholme,' said Jem sternly, and Mark Ruthine merely looked at him over the top of a newspaper which he was not reading.

CHAPTER XXVII

AT BAY

To thine own self be true ;
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

HUMAN nature is, after all, a hopeless failure. Not even the very best instinct is safe. It will probably be turned sooner or later to evil account.

The best instinct in Anna Agar was her maternal love, and upon this strong rock she finally wrecked her barque. She was one of those women who hold that, so long as the object is unselfish, the means used to obtain it cannot well be evil. She did not say this

in so many words, because she was quite without principle, good or bad, and she invariably acted on impulse.

Her impulse at this time was to turn as much of heaven and earth as came under her influence to compel Dora to marry Arthur. That Arthur should be unhappy, and should be allowed to continue in that common condition, was a thought that she could not tolerate or allow. Something must be done, and it was characteristic of the woman that that something should present itself to her in the form of the handy and useful lie. In a strait we all naturally turn to that accomplishment in which we consider ourselves most proficient. The blusterer blusters ; the profane man swears ; the tearful woman weeps—and weeping, by the way, is no mean accomplishment if it be used at the right moment.

Mrs. Agar naturally meditated on that form of diplomacy which is sometimes called lying. The truth would not serve her purpose (not that she had given it a fair trial), and therefore she would forsake the straight path for that other one which hath many turnings.

Dora absolutely refused to come to Stagholme while Arthur was there—a delicacy of feeling which, by the way, was quite incomprehensible to Mrs. Agar. It was necessary for Arthur's happiness that he should see Dora again and try the effect of another necktie and further eloquence. Therefore, Dora must be made by subterfuge to see Arthur.

'Dear Dora,' she wrote, 'it will be a great grief to me if this unfortunate attachment of my poor boy's is allowed to interfere with the affection which has existed between us since your infancy. Come, dear, and see

me to-morrow afternoon. I shall be quite alone, and the subject which, of course, occupies the first place in my thoughts will, if you wish it, be tabooed.

‘Your affectionate old Friend,

‘ANNA AGAR.’

‘It will be quite easy,’ reflected this diplomatic lady as she folded the letter—almost illegible on account of its impetuosity—‘for Arthur to come back from East Burgen earlier than I expected him.’

The rest she left to chance, which was very kind but not quite necessary, for chance had already taken possession of the rest, and was even at that moment making her arrangements.

Dora read the letter in the garden beneath the laburnam-tree, where she spent a large part of her life. Before reaching the

end of the epistle she had determined to go. She was a young person of spirit as well as of discrimination, and in obedience to the urging of the former was quite ready to show Mrs. Agar, and Arthur, too, if need be, that she was not afraid of them.

She was distinctly conscious of the increasing power of her own strength of purpose as she made this resolution, and as she walked across the park the next afternoon her feeling was one very near akin to elation. It is only the strong who mistrust their own power. Dora Glynde had always looked upon herself as a somewhat weak and easily-led person; she was beginning to feel her own strength now and to rejoice in it. From the first she half-suspected a trap of some sort. Such a subterfuge was so eminently characteristic of Mrs. Agar, and

that lady's manner of welcoming her only increased the suspicion.

The mistress of Stagholme was positively crackling with an excitement which even her best friend could not have called suppressed. There was no suppression whatever about it.

‘So good of you,’ she panted, ‘to come, Dora dear!’

And she searched madly for her pocket-handkerchief.

‘Not at all,’ replied Dora, very calmly.

‘And now, dear,’ went on the lady of the house, ‘are we going to talk about it?’

The question was somewhat futile, for it was easy to see that she was not in a condition to talk of anything else.

‘I think not,’ replied Dora. She had a way of using the word ‘think’ when she was positive. ‘The question was raised the last

time I saw you, and I do not think that any good resulted from it.'

Mrs. Agar's face dropped. In some ways she was a child still, and a childish woman of fifty is as aggravating a creature as walks upon this earth. Dora remembered every word of the interview referred to, while Mrs. Agar had almost forgotten it. It is to the common-minded that common proverbs and sayings of the people apply. Hard words had not the power of breaking anything in Mrs. Agar's being.

'Of course,' she said, '*I* don't wish to talk about it if you don't. It is most painful to me.'

She had dragged forward a second chair, only separated from that occupied by Dora by the tea-table.

'Arthur,' she said, with a lamentable

assumption of cheerfulness, 'has driven over to East Burgen to get some things I wanted. He will not be back for ever so long.'

She reflected that he was overdue at that moment, and that the butler had orders to send him to the library as soon as he returned.

'I was sorry to hear,' said Dora, quite naturally, 'that he had not passed his examination.'

Mrs. Agar glanced at her cunningly ; she was always looking for second meanings in the most innocent remarks, hardly guilty of an original meaning.

At this moment the door leading through a smaller library into the dining-room opened and Arthur came quietly in. He changed colour and hesitated, but only for a moment. Then he remembered that before all things a

gentleman must be a gentleman. He came forward and held out his hand.

‘How do you do?’ he said, and for a moment he was quite dignified; ‘I am glad to see you here with mother. I did not know that I was going to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* tea. No tea, thanks, mother; no.’

‘Have you brought the things I wanted? You are earlier than I expected,’ blurted out the lady of the house unskilfully.

‘Yes, I have brought them.’

‘I must go and see if they are right,’ said Mrs. Agar rising, and before he could stop her she passed out of the door by which he had entered.

For a moment there was an awkward silence, then Dora spoke—after the door had been reluctantly closed from without.

‘ I suppose,’ she said, ‘ that this was done on purpose ? ’

‘ Not by me, Dora.’

She merely bowed her head.

‘ Do you believe me ? ’ he asked.

‘ Yes.’

She continued to sip her tea, and he actually handed her a plate of biscuits.

‘ Is it still No ? ’ he asked abruptly.

‘ Yes.’

Perhaps her fresh youthful beauty moved him, perhaps it was merely opposition that raised his love suddenly to the dignity of a passion, that made him for once forget himself, his clothes, his personal appearance, and the gentlemanly modulation of his voice.

For a moment he was almost a man. He almost touched the height of a man’s ascendancy over woman.

‘You may say No now,’ he cried, ‘but I shall have you yet. Some day you will say Yes.’

It was then for the first time that Dora realised that this man did actually love her according to his lights. But never for an instant did she admit in her own mind the possibility of succumbing to Arthur’s will. It is not by words that men command women. They must first command their respect, and that is never gained by words.

Dora was conscious of a feeling of sudden, unspeakable pain. Arthur had only succeeded in convincing her that she could have submitted to a man’s will, wholly and without reserve ; but not to the will of Arthur Agar. He had only showed her that such a submission would in itself have been a greater happiness than she had ever tasted. But she

knew at once that only one man ever had, ever could have had, the power of exacting such submission ; and he commanded it, not by word of mouth (for he never seemed to ask it), but by something strong and just and good within himself, before which her whole being bowed down.

We never know how we appear in the eyes of our neighbours, friends, or lovers. Arthur was at that moment in Dora's eyes a mere sham, aping something he could never attain.

He had seized her two hands in his nervous and delicate fingers, from which she easily withdrew them. The action was natural enough, strong enough. But he completely spoiled the effect by the words he spoke in his thin tenor voice.

‘No, Arthur,’ she said. ‘No, Arthur ;

since you mention the future, I may as well tell you *now* that my answer will never be anything but No. At one time I thought that it might be different. I told my mother that possibly, after a great many years, I might think otherwise; but I retract that. I shall never think otherwise. And if you imagine that you can force me to do so, please lay aside that hope at once.'

'Then there is someone else!' cried Arthur with an apparent irrelevance. 'I know there is someone else.'

Dora seemed to be reflecting. She looked over his head, out of the window, where the fleecy summer clouds floated idly over the sky.

She turned and looked deliberately at the door through which Mrs. Agar had disappeared. It was standing ajar. Then again

she reflected, weighing something in her mind.

‘Yes,’ she replied half-dreamily at length. ‘I think you have a right to know—there is someone else.’

‘Was,’ corrected Arthur, with the womanly intuition which was given to him with other womanly traits.

‘Was and is,’ replied Dora quietly. ‘His being dead makes no difference so far as you are concerned.’

‘Then it *was* Jem! I was sure it was Jem,’ said a third voice.

In the excitement of the moment Mrs. Agar forgot that when ladies and gentlemen stoop to eavesdropping they generally retire discreetly and return after a few moments, humming a tune, hymns preferred.

‘I knew that you were there,’ said Dora, with a calmness which was not pleasant to the ear. ‘I saw your black dress through the crack of the door. You did not stand quite still, which was a pity, because the sunlight was on the floor behind you. I was not surprised ; it was worthy of you.’

‘I take God to witness,’ cried Mrs. Agar, ‘that I only heard the last words as I came back into the room.’

‘Don’t,’ said Dora, ‘that is blasphemy.’

‘Arthur,’ cried Mrs. Agar, ‘will you hear your mother called names?’

‘We will not wrangle,’ said Dora, rising with something very like a smile on her face. ‘Yes, if you want to know, it *was* Jem. I have only his memory, but still I can be faithful to that. I don’t care if all the world knows ; that is why I told *you* behind the

door. I am not ashamed of it. I always did care for Jem.'

There was a little pause, for mother and son had nothing to answer. Dora turned to take her gloves, which she had laid on a side table, and as she did so the other door opened, the principal door leading to the hall. Moreover, it was opened without the menial pause, and they all turned in surprise, knowing that there were only servants in the house.

In the doorway stood Jem, brown-faced, lean, and anxious-looking. There was something wolf-like in his face, with the fierce blue eyes shining from beneath dark lashes, the fair moustache pushed forward by set lips.

Behind him the keen face of Seymour Michael peered nervously, restlessly from side to side. He was distinctly suggestive of a rat in a trap. And beyond him, in the gloom of

the old arras-hung hall, a third man, seemingly standing guard over Seymour Michael, for he was not looking into the room but watching every movement made by the General—a tall man, dark, upright, with a silent, clean-shaven face, a total stranger to them all. But his manner was not that of a stranger ; he seemed to have something to do there.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAST LINK

A thing hereditary in the race comes unawares.

JEM came straight into the room, and there seemed to be no one in it for him but Dora. She went to meet him with outstretched hand, and her eyes were answering the questions that she read in his. He took her hand and he said no word, but suddenly all the misery of the last year slipped back, as it were, into a dream. She could not define her thoughts then, and they left no memory to recall afterwards. She seemed to forget that this man had been dead and was

living, she only knew that her hand was within his. Jem looked round to the others present, his attitude a judgment in itself, his face, in its fierce repose, a verdict.

Mark Ruthine had gently pushed Seymour Michael into the room and was closing the door behind them. Mrs. Agar did not see the General, who was half concealed by his junior officer. She could not take her eyes from Jem's face.

‘ This is fortunate,’ he said ; and the sound of his voice was music in Dora's ears. ‘ This is fortunate, everyone seems to be here.’

He paused for a moment, as if at a loss, and drew his brown hand down over his moustache. Perhaps he felt remotely that his position was strong and almost dramatic ; but that, being a simple, honest Englishman, he was unable to turn it to account.

He turned towards Seymour Michael, who stood behind, uncomfortably conscious of Mark Ruthine at his heels. It was not in Jem to make an effective scene. Englishmen are so. We do not make our lives superficially picturesque by apostrophising the shade of a dead mother. Jem gave way to the natural instinct of a soldier by nature and training. A clear statement of the facts, and a short, sharp judgment.

‘This man,’ he said, laying his hand on the General’s shoulder, and bringing him forward, ‘has been brought here by us to explain something.’

White-lipped, breathless, in a ghastly silence Anna Agar and Seymour Michael stared at each other over the dainty tea-table, across a gulf of misused years, through the tangle of two unfaithful lives.

Then Jem Agar began his story, addressing himself to Dora, then, and until the end.

‘I was not with Stevenor,’ he said, ‘when his force was surprised and annihilated. I had been sent on through an enemy’s country into a position which no man had the right to ask another to hold with the force allowed me. This man sent me. All his life has he been seeking glory at the risk of other men’s lives. After the disaster he came to me and relieved my little force ; but he proposed to me a scheme of exploration, which I have carried through. But even now I shall not get the credit ; *he* will have that. It was a low, scurrilous thing to do ; for he was my commanding officer, and I could not say No.’

‘I gave you the option,’ blurted out Michael sullenly.

Jem took no notice of the interruption, which only had the effect of making Mark Ruthine move up a few paces nearer.

‘He made a great point of secrecy,’ continued Agar, ‘which at the time I thought to be for my safety. But now I see otherwise; Ruthine has pointed it out to me. If I had never come back he would have said nothing, and would thus have escaped the odium of having sent a man to certain death. I only made one condition—namely, that three persons should be informed at once of my survival, after the disaster to Stevenor’s force. Those three persons were my brother Arthur, my step-mother, and Miss Glynde.’

He paused for a moment, and Dora’s clear, low voice took up the narrative.

‘I met General Michael,’ she said, ‘in

London, some months ago. I met him more than once. He knew quite well who I was, and he never told me.'

Thus was the first link of the chain riveted. Seymour Michael winced. He never raised his eyes.

Mark Ruthine moved forward again. He did so with a singular rapidity, for he had seen murder flash from beneath Jem Agar's eyebrows. He was standing between them, his left hand gripping Jem's right arm with an undeniable strength. Dora, looking at them, suddenly felt the tears well to her eyes. There was something that melted her heart strangely in the sight of those two men—friends—standing side by side; and at that moment her affection went out towards Mark Ruthine, the friend of Jem, who understood Jem, who knew Jem and

loved him, perhaps, a thousandth part as well as she did; an affection which was never withdrawn all through their lives.

It was Ruthine's voice that broke the silence, giving Jem time to master himself.

'It is to his credit,' he said, also addressing Dora, 'that for very shame he did not dare to tell you that he had sent Agar on a mission which was as unnecessary as it was dangerous. When he sent him he must have known that it was almost a sentence of death.'

Then Jem spoke again.

'As soon as I got back to civilisation,' he said, 'I wrote to him as arranged, and I enclosed letters to—the three persons who were admitted into the secret. Those letters have, of course, never reached their destination. General Michael will be required to explain that also.'

At this moment Arthur Agar gave a strange little cackling laugh, which drew the general attention towards him. He was looking at his half-brother, with a glitter in his usually soft and peaceful eyes.

‘There are a good many things which he will have to explain.’

‘Yes,’ answered Jem. ‘That is why we have brought him here.’

It fell to Arthur Agar’s lot to forge the second link.

‘When,’ he asked Jem, ‘did he know that you had got back to safety and civilisation?’

‘Two months ago, by telegram.’

The half-brothers turned with one accord towards Seymour Michael, who stood trying to conceal the quiver of his lips.

‘He promised,’ said Arthur Agar, ‘to tell

me at once when he received news of your safety.'

It was singular that Seymour Michael should give way at that moment to a little shrinking movement of fear—back and away, not from Jem, who towered huge and powerful above him, but from the frail and delicate younger brother. Mark Ruthine, who was standing behind, saw the movement and wondered at it. For it would appear that, of all his judges, Seymour Michael feared the weakest most.

And so the second link was welded on to the first, while only Anna Agar knew the motive that had prompted Michael to suppress the news. She divined that it was spite towards herself, and for once in her life, with that intuition which only comes at

supreme moments, she had the wisdom to bide her time.

Then at last Seymour Michael spoke. He did not raise his eyes, but his words were evidently addressed to Arthur.

‘I acted,’ he said, ‘as I thought best. Secrecy was necessary for Agar’s safety. I knew that if I told you too much you would tell your mother, and—I know your mother better than either you or Jem Agar know her. She is not fit to be trusted with the most trifling secret.’

‘Well, you see, you were quite wrong,’ burst out Mrs. Agar with a derisive laugh. ‘For I knew it all along. Arthur told me at the first.’

Her voice came as a shock to them all. It was harsh and common, the voice of the street-wrangler.

‘Then,’ cried Seymour Michael, as sharp as fate, ‘why did you not tell Miss Glynde?’

He raised his arm, pointing one lean dark finger into her face.

‘I knew,’ he hissed, ‘that the boy would tell you. I counted on it. Why did you not tell Miss Glynde? Come! Tell us why.’

Mark Ruthine’s face was a study. It was the face of a very keen sportsman at the corner of a ‘drive.’ In every word he saw twice as much as simple Jem Agar ever suspected.

‘Well,’ answered Mrs. Agar, wavering, ‘because I thought it better not.’

‘No,’ Dora said, ‘you kept it from me because you wanted me to marry Arthur. And you thought that I should do so because he was master of Stagholme. You wanted

to trick me into marrying Arthur before'—she hesitated—'before——'

'Before I came back,' added Jem imperturbably.

'That was it, that was it!' cried Seymour Michael, grasping at the straw which might serve to turn the current aside from himself.

But the attempt failed. No one took any notice of it. Jem was looking at Dora, and she was looking anywhere except at him.

It was Jem who spoke, with the decisiveness of the president of a court-martial.

'That will come afterwards,' he said. 'And now, perhaps,' he went on, turning towards Seymour Michael, 'you will kindly explain why you broke your word to me. Explain it to these I—— to Miss Glynde.'

Seymour Michael shrugged his shoulders.

‘Why, what is the good of making all this fuss about it now?’ he exclaimed. ‘It has all come right. I acted as I thought best. That is all the explanation I have to offer.’

‘Can you not do better than that?’ inquired Jem, with a dangerous suavity. ‘You had better try.’

Dora was looking at Jem now, appealingly. She knew that tone of voice, and feared it. She alone suspected the anger that was hidden behind so calm an exterior.

Seymour Michael preserved a dogged silence, glancing from side to side beneath his lowered lashes. He had not forgotten Jem’s threat, but he felt the safeguard of a lady’s presence.

‘I can offer an explanation,’ put in Mark Ruthine. ‘This man is mentally incapable of telling the truth and of doing the straight

thing. There are some people who are born liars. This man is one. It is not quite fair to judge him as one would judge others. I have known him for years, have watched him, have studied him.'

All eyes turned towards Seymour Michael, who stood half-cringing, trembling with fear and hatred towards his relentless judges.

'Years ago,' pursued Ruthine, 'at the outset of life, he committed a wanton crime. He did a wrong to a poor innocent woman, whose only fault was to love him beyond his deserts. He was engaged to be married to her, and meeting a richer woman he had not the courage to ask to be released from his engagement. It happened that by a mistake he was gazetted "dead" at the time of the Mutiny. He never contradicted the mistake—

that was how he got out of his engagement. He played the same trick with Jem Agar's name. I recognised it.'

Then the last link of the chain was forged.

'So did I,' said Anna Agar. 'I was the woman.'

Before the words were well out of her mouth Mark Ruthine's voice was raised in an alarmed shout :

'Look out !' he cried. 'Hold that man ; he is mad !'

No one had been noticing Arthur Agar —no one except Seymour Michael, who had never taken his eyes from his face during Ruthine's narration.

With a hideous groan, unlike a human sound at all, Arthur Agar had rushed forward when his mother spoke, and for a few

seconds there was a wild confusion in the room, while Seymour Michael, white with dread, fled before his doom. In and out among the people and the furniture, shouting for help, he leapt and struggled. Then there came a crash. Seymour Michael had broken through the window, smashing the glass, with his arms doubled over his face.

A second later Arthur wrenched open the sash and gave chase across the lawn. In the confusion some moments elapsed before the two heavier men followed him over the smooth turf, and the ladies from the window saw Arthur Agar kneeling over Seymour Michael on the stone terrace at the end of the lawn. They heard with cruel distinctness the sharp crackling crash of the Jew's head upon the stone flags, as Arthur shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

Instinctively they followed, and as they came up to the group where Ruthine was kneeling over Seymour Michael, while Jem dragged Arthur away, they heard the Doctor say—

‘Agar, get the ladies away. This man is dead. Look sharp, man ! They mustn’t see this.’

And Jem barred their way with one hand, while he held his half-brother with the other.

CHAPTER XXIX

SETTLED

For love in sequel works with fate.

THE four walked back to the library together. Mrs. Agar looked back over her shoulder at every other footstep. She took no notice of her son. Her affection for him seemed suddenly to have been absorbed and lost in some other emotion.

Jem was half supporting, half carrying Arthur, whose eyes were like those of a dead man, while his lips were parted in a vacant, senseless way.

Already Ruthine could be heard giving

his orders to the gardeners and other servants who had gathered round him in a wonderfully short space of time.

Dora passed into the library first, treading carefully over the broken glass, and Mrs. Agar followed her without appearing to notice the sound of breakage beneath her feet. No one had spoken a word since Mark Ruthine had told them that Seymour Michael was dead. There are some situations in life wherein we suddenly realise what an inadequate thing human speech is. There are some things that others know which we have never told them, and would ever be unable to tell them. There are some feelings within us for which no language can find expression.

Mrs. Agar was simply stupefied. When God does mete out punishment here on earth, He does so with an overflowing measure.

This devoted mother did not even evince anxiety as to the welfare of her son, for whose sake she had made so many blunders, so many futile plots.

Jem brought Arthur into the room, and led him to an arm-chair. There was that steady masterfulness in his manner which comes to those who have looked on death in many forms and whom nothing can dismay.

He offered no unnecessary assistance or advice, did not fussily loosen Arthur's necktie, or perform any of those small inappropriate offices which some would have deemed necessary under the circumstances. He knew quite well that this was no matter of a necktie or a collar.

Mrs. Agar seated herself on a sofa opposite, and slowly swayed her body backwards and forwards. She was one of those persons

who can never separate mental anguish from physical pain. They have but one way of expressing both, and possibly of feeling both. Her hands were clasped on her lap, her head on one side, her lips drawn back as if in agony. She even went so far as to breathe laboriously.

Thus they remained ; Jem watching Arthur, Dora watching Jem, who seemed to ignore her presence.

It was Mrs. Agar who spoke first, angrily and bitterly.

‘What is the good of standing there?’ she said to Jem. ‘Can’t you find something more useful to do than that?’

Jem looked at her, first with surprise and then with something very nearly approaching contempt.

‘I am waiting,’ he replied, ‘for Ruthine. He is a doctor.’

‘Who wants a doctor now? What is the good of a doctor now—now that Seymour is dead? I don’t know what he is doing here, at any rate, meddling.’

‘Arthur wants a doctor,’ replied Jem. ‘Can you not see that he is in a sort of trance? He hears and sees nothing. He is quite unconscious.’

Mrs. Agar seemed only half to understand. She stared at her son, swaying backwards and forwards in imbecile misery.

‘Oh dear! oh dear!’ she whispered, ‘what have we done to deserve this?’

After a few seconds she repeated the words.

‘What have we done to deserve this? What have we done’

Her voice died away into a whisper, and when that became inaudible her lips went on

moving, still framing the same words over and over again.

In this manner they waited, with that dull senselessness to the flight of time which follows on a great shock.

They all heard the clatter of horses' feet on the gravel of the avenue, and probably they all divined that Mark Ruthine had sent for medical help.

To Dora the sound brought a sudden boundless sense of relief. Amidst this mental confusion it came as a practical common-sense proof that the tension of the last year was over. The burden of her own life was by it lifted from her shoulders ; for Jem was here, and nothing could matter very much now.

Presently Ruthine came into the room. As he went towards Arthur he glanced at

Dora and then at Mrs. Agar, but the young fellow was evidently his first care.

While he was kneeling by the low chair examining Arthur's eyes and face, Mrs. Agar suddenly rose and crossed the room.

‘Is he dead?’ she asked abruptly.

‘Who?’ inquired Mark Ruthine, without looking round.

‘Seymour Michael.’

‘Yes.’

‘Quite?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then Arthur killed him?’

‘Yes.’

All this while Arthur was lying back in the chair, white and lifeless. His eyes were open, he breathed regularly, but he heard nothing that was said, nor saw anything before his eyes.

‘Then,’ said Mrs. Agar, ‘that was a murder?’

She was looking out of the window, towards the stone terrace, already conscious that the scene that she had witnessed there would never be effaced from her memory while she had life.

After a little pause Mark Ruthine spoke.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘it was not that. Your son was not responsible for his actions when he did it. I think I can prove that. I do not yet know what it was. It was very singular. I think it was some sort of mental aberration—temporary, I hope, and think. We will see when he recovers himself—when the circulation is restored.’

While he spoke he continued to examine his patient. He spoke in his natural tone,

without attempting to lower his voice, for he knew that Arthur Agar had no comprehension of things terrestrial at that time.

‘It was not,’ he went on, ‘the action of a sane man. Besides, he could not have done it. In his right mind he could not have killed Seymour Michael, who was a strong man. As it is, I think that there was some sort of paralysis in Seymour Michael—a paralysis of fear. He seemed too frightened to attempt to defend himself. Besides, why should your son do it?’

‘He was born hating him.’

Mark Ruthine slowly turned, still upon his knees. He rose, and in his dark face there was that strange eagerness again, like the eagerness of a sportsman approaching some unknown quarry in the jungle.

‘What do you mean, Mrs. Agar?’ he asked.

‘I mean that he was born with a hatred for that man stronger than anything that was in him. His soul was given to him full of hate for Seymour Michael. Such things are when a woman bears a child in the midst of great passion.’

‘Yes,’ said Mark Ruthine, ‘I know.’

‘The night he was born,’ Mrs. Agar went on, ‘I first saw and spoke to that man after he had come back from India—after I had learnt what he had done.’

Ruthine turned round towards Jem and Dora.

‘You hear that?’ he said to them. ‘This is not the story of a mother trumped up in court to save her son. It is the truth. There are some things which we do not

understand even yet. Don't forget what you have heard. It will come in usefully.'

He turned to Mrs. Agar again.

'Did he know the story?' he asked.

'He never heard it until you told it just now.'

'You can swear to that, Mrs. Agar?'

'Yes.'

'Then,' said Ruthine, 'he does not know now that you are the woman whom Seymour Michael wronged. He need never know it. The paroxysm had come on before you spoke—that was why I shouted. He was mad with hate before you opened your lips.'

Mrs. Agar was now beginning to realise what was at stake. The mother's love was reawakening. The old cunning look came into her eyes, and her quick, truthless mind was evidently on the alert. There was

something animal-like in Mrs. Agar ; but she was of the lower order of animal, that seeks to defend its young by cunning and not by sheer bravery.

Ruthine must have guessed at something, for he said at once :

‘ Remember what you have told me. You will have to repeat that exactly. Add nothing to it, take nothing from it, or you will spoil it. Tell me, has your son seen this man more than once ? ’

‘ No, only once ; at Cambridge. ’

‘ All right ; I think I shall be able to prove it. ’

As he spoke he went towards the writing-table, and, sitting down, he wrote out a prescription. Dora followed him and held out her hand for the paper.

‘ Send for that at once, please, ’ he said.

Then he beckoned to Jem.

‘I have sent for the local doctor,’ he said to him. ‘But I should advise having someone else—Llandoller from Harley Street. This is far above *our* heads.’

‘Telegraph for him,’ answered Jem Agar.

While Ruthine wrote he went on speaking.

‘We must get him upstairs at once,’ he said. ‘I should like to have him in bed before the doctor comes.’

In answer to the bell, rung a second time, the servant came, looking white and scared.

‘Show Dr. Ruthine Mr. Arthur’s room,’ said Jem; and Ruthine took Arthur up in his arms like a child.

When they had gone there was a silence. Mrs. Agar made no attempt to follow. She

sat down again on the sofa, swaying backwards and forwards. Perhaps she was dimly aware that there remained something still to be said.

Jem Agar crossed the room and stood in front of her. Dora, from the background, was pleading with her eyes for this woman. There were the makings of a very hard man in James Edward Makerstone Agar, and seven years of the grimmest soldiering of modern days had done nothing to soften him. He was strictly just; but it is not justice that women want. To all men there comes a time when they recognise the fact that all their time and all their energies are required for the taking care of *one* woman, and that all the rest must take care of themselves.

‘You may stay,’ he said to his step-

mother, 'until Arthur is removed from this house—but no longer. I shall never pretend to forgive you, and I never want to see you again.'

Mrs. Agar made no answer, nor did she look up.

'Go,' said Jem, with a little jerk of his head towards the door.

Slowly she rose, and without looking at either of them she passed out of the room.

Then, at last, they were left alone in the quiet library where they had played together as children, where the happiest moments of his life and the most miserable of hers had been lived through.

Dora did not seem to know quite what to do. She was standing by the writing-table, with one hand resting on it, facing him, but not looking at him. She suddenly felt

unable to do that—felt at a loss, abashed, unequal to the moment.

But Jem seemed to have no hesitation. He was quite natural and very deliberate. He seemed to know quite well what to do. He closed the door behind Mrs. Agar, and then he came across the room and took Dora in his arms, as if there were no question about it. He said nothing. After all, there was nothing to be said.

THE END

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